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Child poverty in Victorian Shropshire:
children and the Shropshire Poor Law
Unions 1834-1870

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Child poverty in Victorian Shropshire: children and the Shropshire Poor Law Unions 1834 - 1870

Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of poor children living in Shropshire between 1834 and 1870. They lived in three different environments: in the workhouse, as part of a labourer's family, or as part of a family in receipt of out-relief. The standard of living of the families of agricultural workers, the predominant form of employment in most of Shropshire, was very low, with wages too low to provide adequate levels of nutrition.

Families in receipt of out-relief had an even lower standard of living than those of agricultural labourers, because levels of out-relief were lower than labourers' wages.

This thesis also examines the life that children led if they were inmates of the workhouse. Children in the workhouse received an education, the quality of which varied across the county, but was very good at the Bridgnorth workhouse school, latterly known as South East Shropshire District School. Poor children living at home would have had limited opportunity for education because of the cost. Medical care was organised by the Poor Law Union for indoor and outdoor paupers, and provided free. It was not provided for independent families. Apprenticeships were satisfactorily organised by the Shropshire Unions, though some apprentices were inappropriately placed in mines. Amounts of out-relief differed across Unions with those Unions committed to the use of the workhouse ungenerous in their payments when compared to Unions taking a positive view of out-relief. For poor children, life in the workhouse, despite its disadvantages, provided greater material benefits than a childhood spent in a poor labourer's family or in a family on out-relief.

Major Primary Sources used

National Library of Wales: William Day Papers.

Shropshire Archives: Poor Law Union Minutes, Medical Records, Application and Report Books, and workhouse records are under the general heading of PL.

The National Archives:

MH 12: Poor Law Union Correspondence with Poor Law Commission
and Poor Law Board

MH 27: Poor Law Administration Department, Correspondence between Poor
Law Board and District Schools

MH 32: Correspondence between Commissioners and Inspectors

Abbreviations

Shropshire Archives: SA

The National Archives: TNA

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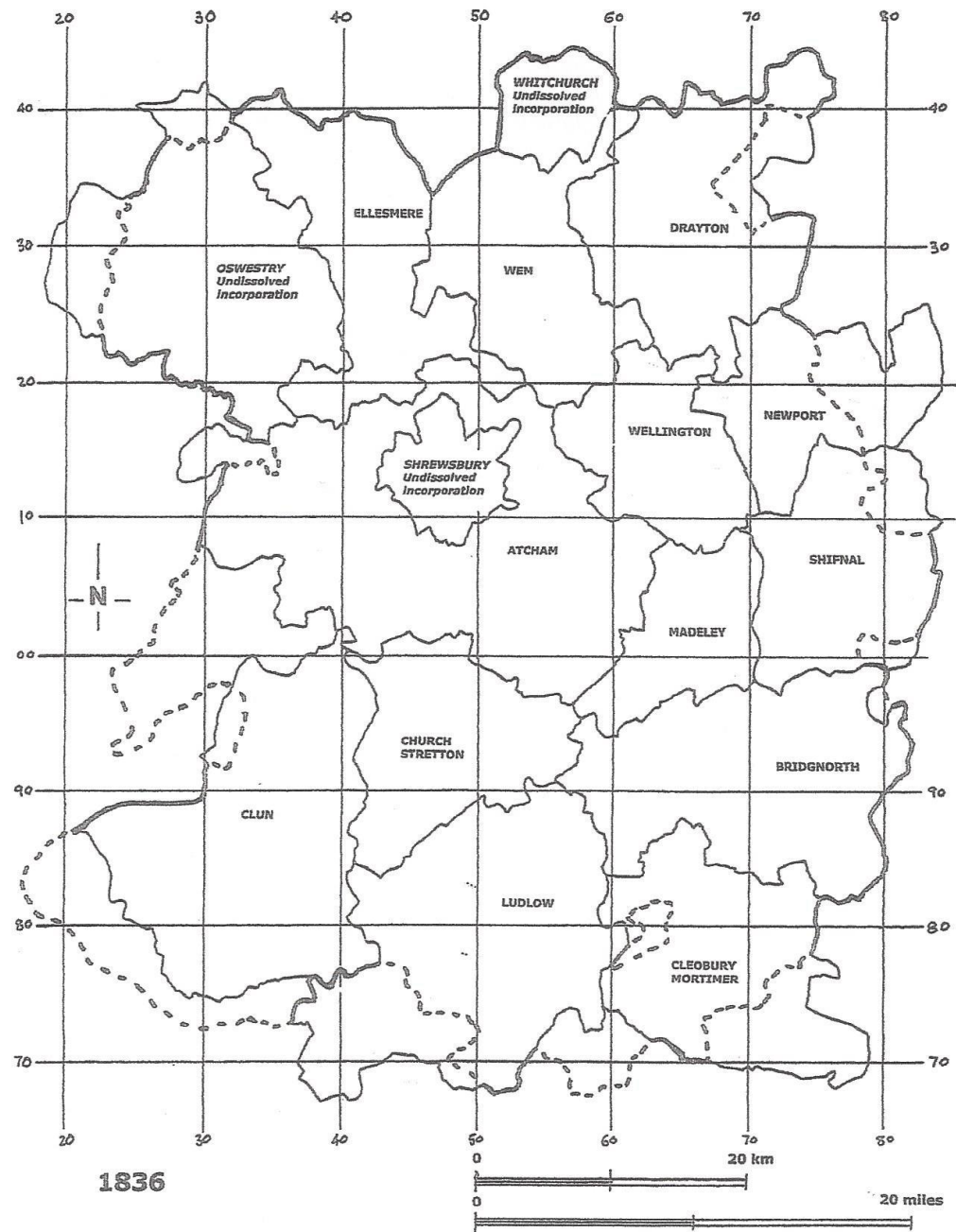
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¹ National Archives, MH12/9938, Poor Law Inspector Doyle to Poor Law Board, writing about Ellesmere Workhouse, 19th January 1856.

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Map of Shropshire Poor Law Unions and Incorporations, 1836



Chapter One

Introduction

Shropshire in the middle decades of the nineteenth century was a large and predominantly agricultural county. In addition to agriculture there was lead mining at Stiperstones, quarrying in many parts of the county and coalmining and iron works around Coalbrookdale. It is situated in the West Midlands and surrounded by the counties of Cheshire, Staffordshire, Hereford and Worcester, Powys and Clwyd. It is the largest inland county of England covering an area of 1,347 square miles.

The timescale of the thesis runs from 1834 until 1870. The first date was chosen because the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was a watershed piece of legislation heralding the end of the Old Poor Law and the beginning of the New Poor Law, which changed both style and substance of poor relief with the widespread introduction of workhouses and attempts to limit out-relief.

The New Poor Law combined central organisation with implementation of poor relief by locally elected Guardians, operating through Poor Law Unions. The end date of 1870 was chosen because that year also marks a watershed moment in the treatment of the poor with the Crusade against Out-Relief which limited the number of the poor relieved at home.

This chapter outlines the historical background to the Poor Law Amendment Act, the economic factors contributing to rural poverty, the evolution of the vocabulary used to identify the poor, examines the writing of historians centring on the subject of this thesis, outlines the precise meaning of terms like 'childhood' and 'poverty' as they

impact on this thesis. Finally, this chapter identifies key questions about the lives of poor children, which successive chapters will seek to answer.

This thesis developed from background knowledge of the New Poor Law in

Shropshire and a wish to research the impact of the legislation on poor children.

There are many works on childhood, with references to the childhood of the poor and some books devoted to the New Poor Law contained sections relating to children.

Crompton's *Workhouse Children* stands out among these as particularly devoted to poor children's experiences.² As this Shropshire thesis developed, however, it

became important to investigate poor children's experiences not only in the workhouse, but also on out-relief and as part of poor but 'independent' families and

this led to comparisons between these sets of experiences. While, like Crompton,

this thesis concentrates on the experiences of poor children, it also recognises the

role that was played by successive central administrations. The New Poor Law in

Shropshire is also best understood by reference to the national picture, 'national as it pertains to England and Wales'.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 radically changed the previous legislation,

passed in 1601. The 1834 law established a three man Poor Law Commission to

administer the implementation of the new law. The main provisions of the Bill were:

the partial abolition of out-relief, in which the poor received benefits in their own

home, to be replaced by support only given in workhouses; different classes of

paupers in the workhouse would be segregated such that husband and wife would be

parted; the Poor Law Commission was charged with imposing a uniform system.

² F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton Publishing, 1997).

It was recognised that individual parishes would not have the resources to maintain a workhouse, so poor law unions, (groups of parishes) were established, locally administered by an elected board, with paid officials. In the eighteenth century much of Shropshire had been organised into incorporations, (groups of parishes similar to poor law unions) which did not have to dissolve as a result of the 1834 Act. As a result, Shropshire parishes were in thirteen poor law unions, with the addition of the Incorporations of Oswestry, Whitchurch (dissolved in 1854) and Shrewsbury.³

Shropshire is a valuable county in which to investigate the working of the New Poor Law, situated as it is in the West Midlands, and thus separated (in New Poor Law terms) from compliant south of England, but equally not part of the recalcitrant north of England, or equally recalcitrant Wales.⁴ The Shropshire Unions provide favourable territory for a study of the relief of child poverty because they offer variety in the manner in which they approached the New Poor Law.

Before the Poor Law Amendment Act most poor relief was dispensed by parish officials, though there were Incorporations in the north of Shropshire which used Houses of Industry as a means of setting the poor to work. Incorporations could only be formed via an Act of Parliament which allowed parishes to join together to relieve the poor through the use of a House of Industry to house the poor as an alternative to relieving the poor in their own home. The Shropshire Incorporations formed in the late eighteenth century were Shrewsbury, Atcham, Ellesmere, Oswestry and Whitchurch. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 required Poor Law Unions to be formed, classically consisting of a central market town, surrounded by other parishes, with the responsibility of relieving the poor of the Union, vested in an elected Board of

³ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 61 – 73.

⁴ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 61 – 75.

Guardians. Incorporations were not required to re-form as Unions but could do so. Atcham and Ellesmere Incorporations decided to become Poor Law Unions and Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Whitchurch choose to remain as Incorporations. Eleven other Unions were formed in Shropshire - at Bridgnorth, Shifnal, Wellington, Madeley, Cleobury Mortimer, Ludlow, Clun, Church Stretton, Drayton, Newport and Wem. With the addition of Atcham and Ellesmere there were thirteen Shropshire Poor Law Unions formed. The Whitchurch Incorporation dissolved itself in 1854 and became a Poor Law Union.⁵

Of the thirteen Unions, nine were predominantly agricultural. Of the others Wellington was almost entirely industrial. Madeley was generally industrial with agricultural parishes south of the River Severn. Newport and Shifnal were a mixture of agricultural and industrial. The four Unions with industry were located in the north-east of the county near the Shropshire coalfield.

Many of the rural Unions embraced wholeheartedly the workhouse concept and they build edifices out of all proportion to their likely inmate population. Some industrial Unions approached the New Poor Law with a wary pragmatism and without showing overt defiance to the Commission and Board, they made their own decisions on how to relieve paupers. One Union led by Baldwyn Leighton took a zealous ideological stance in support of the Poor Law Amendment Act and one union led by William Wolryche Whitmore viewed the education of pauper children as the key to solving the problem of inherited poverty. Other unions sought to preserve some facets of the Old Poor Law although some like Ludlow allowed initial commitment to the Poor Law Amendment Act to develop into practical, non-ideological practice.

⁵ L. Smith, 'Refuges of last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeology Society*, Volume LXXXII (2007), p. 6. A list of parishes in Shropshire Unions can be found at www.parishmouse.co.uk/shropshire, accessed in June 2015.

The Elizabethan Poor law, enacted in 1597 and amended in 1601 established the parish as the administrative structure responsible for the care of the poor and raising income to pay for that care. That administration was generally undertaken by churchwardens and overseers, the latter nominated by justices of the peace.⁶

One consequence of the relief of the poor administered by parishes was concern over which parish the poor belonged to. The result was the Act of Settlement 1662 which attempted to establish criteria for establishing a legal settlement parish for men, women and children in the country, thus denoting which parish was responsible for supporting which poor people.⁷ During the 17th century some large towns established a poorhouse (or workhouse) to house the parish poor and to organise work for them in the building. Philanthropists espoused workhouses in which the poor worked, as a valuable recipient of their charity.⁸

The permissive Gilbert Act of 1782 enabled parishes to combine to build workhouses, and these combinations of parishes could replace parish overseers with magistrate appointed Guardians. The economics of scale allowed the combinations of parishes to build a workhouse when individual parishes could not.⁹

Many rural parishes, whether singly, or in a collaboration of parishes set up workhouses during the 18th century. Many parishes in north Shropshire established incorporations which allowed groups of parishes to pool their resources in this way.¹⁰

⁶ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave .MacMillan, 2002), pp. 9 – 10; P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531 – 1782* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp 9 – 11.

⁷ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave .MacMillan, 2002), pp. 9 – 10; P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531 – 1782* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp 28 - 30.

⁸ D. T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 26.

⁹ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave .MacMillan, 2002), p. 21.

¹⁰ Thesis, pp. 2 – 3.

The Act of 1723 gave parishes the power to build workhouses, farm the poor, and the power to refuse relief to those who refused to enter the workhouse.¹¹ In practice where the largest numbers of poor were the old, the ill, the disabled and children it was easier and cheaper to maintain them with a weekly dole.¹²

From the middle of the eighteenth century the treatment of the poor became inextricably bound up with the effects of economic change. Enclosures, decline of cottage industries, combined with a large increase of population brought the cost of caring for the poor into sharp relief.

These structural problems were exacerbated by a combination of bad weather and poor harvest, political unrest on the continent and war with France and as a result poor rates, the means by which poor relief was funded, increased considerably. The national poor rate increased from £1.5 million in 1776 to £4 million pounds in 1803.¹³

At the same time there was a fear of unemployed poor men emulating their French revolutionary counterparts. As a counterbalance to this there was a view, particularly among Anglican clergy and magistrates (often the same people) to shore up the social fabric with generous relief policies. One of these policies was the allowance system, and the most widely known application of this was at Speenhamland in Berkshire. The magistrates there were concerned about local pauperism, particularly of employed families whose wages were insufficient to meet the families' basic needs. In Speenhamland the allowance was based on the price of bread such that an overseer could calculate the level of relief by reference to wage level, family size and the price of bread. While it was a recognition of very low wages, and a recognition

¹¹ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 13; S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part 1: The Old Poor Law* (Longmans Green 1927), pp. 277 – 308.

¹² D. Marshall, *The English Poor Law in the Eighteenth Century; a study in social and administrative history* (Routledge and Sons, 1926), pp. 92 – 94.

¹³ A. J. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth Century England* (Macmillan, 1999), p. 168.

that poverty was a social and economic problem, its ubiquity was exaggerated, but it provided a target for those intellectuals and political economists seeking a market-driven and punitive solution to pauperism.¹⁴

An influential figure in the intellectual community in the last years of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the 19th was Thomas Malthus. He argued essentially that population growth should be checked to reduce pressure on resources and the decline of wage levels.¹⁵

Public relief for the poor exacerbated the problem by creating the conditions for the poor to procreate, and thus increase the population. He recommended abolition of public organised poor relief to force the poor to live within their means.¹⁶ Malthus' 'Essay on Population' went through several editions and was influential. Even for those who opposed his views 'Essay on Population' was the text that had to be disavowed.¹⁷

Malthus' critique of organised poor relief echoed the earlier work of Sir Frederick Eden who argued that poverty had its genesis in the poor's lax morality and therefore poverty had its cause in people's lifestyle. Andrew shows that public attitudes to charity moved towards advising the poor on self-help with a basis in moral virtue.¹⁸

As Malthus helped to provide challenging ideas on the futility of poor relief, Jeremy Bentham challenged the abolitionists. Bentham argued not on moral but practical grounds and articulated the problem of creating a desperate very poor under-class with no stake in society, poor supported by charity. He advocated a reformed system

¹⁴ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 29.

¹⁵ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 91.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 91; J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism* (Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1969), p. 157.

¹⁷ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 92.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 89 – 90; D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police* (Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 156, 196.

of public poor relief based on discrimination between the deserving and non-deserving, and not acting as an inducement for the workshy. To achieve this, Bentham advocated a nationwide system of reformed workhouses. Echoing Bentham's idea of a reformed workhouse, in 1819 George Nichols, an overseer at Southwell, imposed a regime on the Southwell workhouse that involved high walls, regulation of diet and timetable, unpleasant physical labour, combined with restrictions on out-relief. There were experiments occurring in various parts of the country in utilising a disciplinary and primitive workhouse to cut the poor rate, apparently with success.¹⁹

There was a change in attitude in the early decade of the 19th century with workhouses based on a disciplinary ethos replacing Houses of Industry where the paupers were engaged in meaningful production, albeit often unsuccessfully. In many people's minds the poor had lost their respectability and their entitlement to be integral to society.²⁰

At the same time there were many parts of the country where magistrates still upheld paternalist values. For hard-pressed parish officials building and administering a punitive workhouse was expensive and time-consuming.²¹ The roundsman system, existing since the 18th century was one alternative and it involved the unemployed being given work by local farmers, with the cost divided between the farmer and the community. In the late 1820s this system was abused as farmers contributed less and the community contributed more.

¹⁹ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 56.

²⁰ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 111; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 53 – 56.

²¹ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 57.

In places the roundsman system was fine-tuned by an expedient called the labour rate which shared the cost of employing the unemployed more evenly between farmer and parish. The confused state of rural public opinion with its contradictory approaches to relieving the poor was further confused by Captain Swing. Decades of economic change in the countryside, with enclosures, decline of cottage industry, the tendency for farmers to employ day labourers who were not living in the farmhouse led to discontent by rural labourers.²² They turned to machine breaking and arson in their demand for higher rates, and their grievances against a more disciplinarian approach to relief came to the fore. Rural confusion was caused by the conflicting demands of paternalist concern for poor labourers and the demand for an authoritarian response to what some saw as an insurrection. For some, the Swing riots were seen as a part with the overthrow of the Bourbons in France in 1830, though Hobsbawm and Rudé are sceptical of a connection between the two.²³ The political situation also became strained with the election of a Whig government with attendant expectations of reform, though the Whigs were concerned about social instability. This is exemplified by the punishments meted out to rioters, with nineteen executed, and five hundred transported to Australia. This was a more draconian response than the Luddites or the Chartists received.²⁴ However Swing helped to create a political climate needful of a reform of the Poor Laws.

Many of the new Whig MPs represented urban northern constituencies, and the poor law problem was generally considered an issue for the rural south east.

Nevertheless Lord Brougham, the new Lord Chancellor, committed the government in

²² G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750 – 1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 31 – 43.

²³ E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), pp. 88 - 89; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 59.

²⁴ E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), pp. 262 – 263.

June 1831 to reforming the poor law, apparently without consulting his colleagues.

This was followed in February 1832 by an announcement that a commission would be set up to investigate the current state of poor relief.²⁵

The Commission employed twenty-six assistant commissioners each attached to a district who were required to report on employment and employment prospects, wage rates, seasonal unemployment, labourers' savings, the relation between poor relief and incomes and magisterial interference in the poor laws.²⁶

The implication behind many of the fields of enquiry was that they were directed towards rural communities and even the urban enquiries implied a rural bias, and led to a dichotomy between poverty, caused by economic factors, and pauperism, caused by individual weakness compounded by public policy largely in the form of allowances. The enquiries were designed to elicit answers favourable to the preconceived notions of the commissioners.²⁷

An extract of the evidence was published in 1833 and the official report, written by Senior and Chadwick, was published in 1834, and identified the Old Poor Law as corrupt and ridden with abuse and requiring considerable reform.²⁸ Chadwick wrote the section outlining the remedial measures needed to reform the relief system. His

²⁵ S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History Part II, The Last Hundred Years, Volume 1*, (Longmans Green, 1929), pp. 46 – 47.

²⁶ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 118; A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law 1832 – 1839* (Rutgers University Press, 1978), pp. 21 – 22.

²⁷ M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *Journal of Economic History* 23 (1963), pp. 151 – 184; M. Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Re-examined', *Journal of Economic History* 24 (1964), pp. 229 – 245; D. A. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790 – 1834', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, 28 February 1975, pp. 50 – 68.

²⁸ Edwin Chadwick, 1800 – 1890, was initially employed by the Royal Commission on the Poor Law and a year later became a Commissioner and with Nassau Senior drafted the Royal Commission Report. In 1834 he became secretary to the Poor Law Commission, and later he became a noted sanitary reformer.

Nassau Senior was professor of Political Economy at Oxford, was a member of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law and was influential in recommending others to become commissioners. In 1837 he drafted the report of the Royal Commission on Handloom Weavers, and wrote extensively on economic and social affairs.

remedial measures included making unpleasant the obtaining of relief. One way to do this was to establish the principle of 'less eligibility' which maintained that the standard of living of those on relief should be worse than that of an independent labourer who had not sought relief. The second way was to ensure that the only way to obtain relief by the able-bodied was by entering the workhouse, which would be characterised by hard work, strict discipline, a monotonous diet and the separation of family members. This regime was designed to ensure that only the truly desperate and destitute would enter. Administratively the report called for the ending of outdoor relief for the able-bodied, a central organisation combined with local management of poor law unions, which would be formed by the combination of parishes and the building of workhouses.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 radically changed the previous legislation. It established a three-man Poor Law Commission to administer nationally the implementation of the new law. A major provision of the new law was the partial abolition of out-relief, in which the poor received benefits in their own home, to be replaced by support given in the workhouse. Different classes of paupers in the workhouse would be segregated such that husbands and wives and children would be parted.

The building of a workhouse by poor law unions was recommended to be compulsory by the Royal Commission of 1832 – 1834 but a subsequent Act gave the Poor Law Commission 'power only to restrain, not to commend'.²⁹ The Commission to restrain unions from giving outdoor relief but they could not compel them to build a workhouse. They could only persuade. To build a new workhouse was expensive,

²⁹ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, 1983), p. 35.

but could be paid for with government-backed loans, paid gradually via the poor rate but to build a workhouse gave the Union Guardians a dilemma if their priority was to reduce the poor rate. Some unions had more than one small poorhouse which could be used, but would not be suitable if an imposing single mixed building was required. In north Shropshire some unions already possessed suitable workhouses, provided that they were renovated to conform to expectations on the segregation of paupers. To enable workhouses to be built to approved Poor Law Commission designs, the commissioners appointed architect Sampson Kempthorne to provide ready-made workhouse designs which could be used by guardians who could amend them to meet local needs.³⁰

In summary historical events and the ideas of intellectuals created a climate ready for a major piece of poverty legislation in 1834. This legislation was radical in design, with centralised policy-making, but needed to be locally administered, sometimes by people who had administered the Old Poor Law. The Poor Law Commission initially implemented the New Poor Law in the south and east of England, and began work in Shropshire in 1836.

The foregoing provides the national background to the Shropshire experience of meeting the needs of poor children. The New Poor Law was centrally organised but locally administered and Shropshire guardians and union officers had to revisit in a local context many of the issues outlined above.

³⁰ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 77; M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, 1983), p. 40.

Economic Factors

During the period of 1751 to 1851 the population of England increased rapidly. In 1751 the population was approximately 5,772,415, by 1801 it had increased to 8,664,490 and by 1851 it had grown to 16,736,084. During this period life expectancy rose slowly from 36.6 years in 1751 to 39.5 years in 1851 therefore the rise in population was almost entirely due to an increase in the birth rate. This rose from fewer than two children per family in the late seventeenth century to more than three in 1846.³¹ The rise in the number of dependents as a proportion of the population created a burden for adult breadwinners and ratepayers. In 1826 infants comprised 15% of the population and children under 15 comprised 24.1%, thus 39.6% of the population was under 15 years of age.³²

Until the late eighteenth century in the south and east of England agricultural families had potentially four sources of income: employment on a farm, at least during part of the year; employment for part of the year in a cottage industry; owning or renting a small plot of land for the family's own use; and the produce that they took from common wastes. Examining the latter form of income, the use of wastes was valuable to wage-earners to supplement their income, but particularly valuable for the landless.³³ Wastes as a whole provided fuel, thatching materials, sand and stone, loose wool, nuts, berries and wild vegetation such as dandelion and other salad leaves.³⁴ The limitation on the value of wastes lay with their lack of ubiquity and

³¹ R. Schofield, 'British Population Change, 1700 – 1871', *The Economic History of Britain since 1700*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp 64 – 67.

³² Ibid, pp. 75 – 76.

³³ J. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700 – 1820* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 158 – 159.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 158 – 184.

challenges by the law and local landowners to the concept of common rights to wastes.³⁵

Two of those financial opportunities were severely reduced because of the decline in cottage industry as industrialisation progressed, while the rise in wheat prices resulted in an increase in the value of land, making it less likely to be rented to labourers.³⁶ Between 1740 and 1795 the price of wheat increased by 76.3%.³⁷ The rise in wheat prices was probably caused by the demand emanating from a large population, combined with a lack of good harvests.³⁸

Lee and Schofield suggest that while incomes rose during the late eighteenth century, this extra wealth was unevenly distributed. There is evidence that labourers' real wages declined, and that a redistribution of wealth occurred in favour of property owners and the wealthier.³⁹

Employment prospects for agricultural labourers began to decline during the middle eighteenth century to the middle nineteenth century, particularly in the south and east. The traditional system of agricultural employment was typically based around labourers being engaged on year-long contracts, which entailed settlement rights and living-in. Kussmaul writes that after the end of the Napoleonic War large farmers, partly concerned about rising food costs, moved towards the employment of day-labourers. The result of this was two-fold: day labourers did not have to be

³⁵ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York Press, 1991), pp. 97 – 184.

³⁶ G. R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750 – 1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 32.

³⁷ P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688 – 1959*, 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press 1967), p. 91.

³⁸ J. D. Chambers and G. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750 – 1880* (Batsford, 1966), p. 111.

³⁹ R. D. Lee and R. S. Schofield, 'British Population in the Eighteenth Century', in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey, (eds.) *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 29; P. H. Lindert and J. G. Williamson, 'Reinterpreting England's Social Tables 1688 – 1867', *Explorations in Economic History* 20:1 (January 1983), table 2, p. 98.

employed during the winter, and a change of relationship occurred between employers and employed, towards a more capitalist/worker form of industrial and social relations.⁴⁰ Agricultural workplace relationships became more market-driven, and the powerful agents in the market place were the employers.⁴¹ The Captain Swing riots owed much to the decline of traditional rural relationships.⁴²

In the south Midlands, close to Shropshire, evidence shows that in the late seventeenth century 73% of all men worked in agriculture, by 1831 the proportion had shrunk to about 50%, but most tellingly, of that 50%, half were part-time. During approximately the same period opportunities for female agricultural work declined sharply.⁴³ These conditions may not have existed in such a severe form in Shropshire, because as has been seen from James Caird the county was bisected by a line demarcating high and low agricultural wages.⁴⁴ Lees shows that in Wales and parts of the north, farmers continued to employ live-in workers.⁴⁵ Decisions about the New Poor Law of 1834 were made using the experience of the south east of England, so regional experience is crucial to understanding the patchy applicability of the ideas underlying the Poor Law Amendment Act.

Enclosure of common land was in progress in the early modern period, but it was systematically implemented in the century beginning in 1750. It had many positive benefits: a revolution in agricultural methods and productivity, exploitation of minerals and the space for town development.⁴⁶ Enclosure meant that the scattered plots of land in open fields were re-allocated into discrete blocks, and reserved for the sole

⁴⁰ A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 120 – 121.

⁴¹ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 86.

⁴² E. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969).

⁴³ R. C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 243 – 251.

⁴⁴ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Forgotten Books, 2012), p. iv.

⁴⁵ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 87.

⁴⁶ G. E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England* (Longman, 1997), pp. 41 – 45 and pp. 83 – 96.

use of the owner. The rights and customs extinguished by enclosure are impossible to generalise and varied from place to place. Typically though, one right was the opportunity to graze livestock on land after harvest. In villages there might be meadows that could be communally used, or re-allocated fairly each year. Commons were areas of land used for grazing during the summer, a right often granted to cottagers, along with pannage for pigs, wood for fuel, and herbs and berries. Wastes were typically areas of less valuable land, often stony or boggy or heathland, and were used for limited grazing, turves for fuel, and stone for house building and repairs. Enclosures before the middle eighteenth century were generally enclosed by agreement of the landowners in a community. The principal beneficiaries of enclosure were the larger landowners and to a lesser extent the small tenant farmer.⁴⁷

Enclosures caused some people to be losers, however. For the poor the loss of rights involving use of the commons was important. In theory the users of the commons should have been compensated by Enclosure Commissioners because they had lost a valuable right. However there were legal decisions made that obviated the right to compensation. Householders without land often received no compensation because the right to graze on the common was summer only and therefore could not be exercised by someone with no land to overwinter stock. Where compensation was offered for loss of common rights it was only offered to owners, and not to tenants. Mingay includes many examples of poor people eking out a living by using commons, who failed to eke out that living after enclosure.

⁴⁷ Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'The rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming in England', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 1 (2012), pp. 26 – 60.

Property rights became paramount and took precedence over communal rights.

Cottagers were often compensated with small allotments of limited quality.⁴⁸

Horrell and Humphries show that women's wages declined at the time of the early nineteenth century and Lees links that to agricultural modernisation.⁴⁹ Agricultural modernisation is also blamed by Allen for the occurrence of surplus labour: 'the premature release of labour from agriculture caused nothing but poverty'.⁵⁰

Humphries argues strongly that the common rights extinguished by enclosures were significant, particularly to women and children. One effect of this was to make families more dependent on male breadwinners. She uses the word proletarianisation to describe the process of becoming more dependent on wages as non-wage subsistence declined, and that word exemplifies the decline of communal and paternalistic structures, succeeded by an emphasis on property rights, which reached its apogee in the Poor Law Amendment Act.⁵¹

Agrarian capitalism with the progression from small, family-run farms to large farms employing labour occurred first in the south and later in the north of England. A map of average farm size in 1851 clearly shows that south and east of a line running from the Wash to the Bristol Channel are concentrated almost all the counties with larger than average farm sizes. The areas of smallest size farms are in the north west of England and Cornwall.⁵² Shaw Taylor has slight reservations about the accuracy of the figures and the inferences that can be drawn from them, but other maps in his

⁴⁸ G. E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England* (Longman, 1997), Chapter 7.

⁴⁹ S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Old Questions, New Data and Alternative Perspectives', *Journal of Economic History* 21:2 (1992), p. 871.

⁵⁰ Robert C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 262.

⁵¹ Jane Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women: The Proletarianisation of Families in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (March 1990), pp. 17 - 42.

⁵² Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'The rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming in England', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 1 (2012), p. 34.

article show that farms employing no adult males are concentrated in the north of England and the smallest number of such farms is concentrated in the south-east. Another map shows that farms with two or more employees are also concentrated in the south-east.⁵³ In all of these maps Shropshire bestrode the middle ground.⁵⁴

The conclusion that can readily be drawn from this data is that larger farms employing labourers were disproportionately concentrated south and east below a line between the Wash and the Bristol Channel.

The change of vocabulary

There was a shift from describing poor people as 'poor' to the term 'pauper'. The word poor describes a human condition and could be further differentiated by adjectives like 'deserving, undeserving', 'industrious' and 'lazy', which were used to categorise the poor. Lees argues that in the early nineteenth century the word 'pauper' began to be used to describe the poor, and that this word came to be used in a pejorative way. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries pauper was merely a synonym for a poor person, with legal rights connected with that status. By 1775 the word pauper came to mean 'a person in receipt of poor relief'.⁵⁵ By the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word acquired its pejorative status.⁵⁶ Once the poor became disembodied by the term pauper, implicitly meaning dependent on relief and redolent of idleness and lack of moral virtue and socially excluded it

⁵³ Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'The rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming in England', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 1 (2012), p. 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 26 – 60.

⁵⁵ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵⁶ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 39 – 41.

became easier for the poor to be treated as they came to be after 1834.⁵⁷ Poverty was often seen as not regrettable but necessary. Patrick Colquhoun wrote in his 1806 *Treatise on Indigence* 'Poverty is therefore a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society, without which nations and communities could not exist in a state of civilisation. It is the lot of man.'⁵⁸ This view of actual poverty as inevitable was, of course, the view of those who were not themselves poor, but they were the people who could communicate in print and had control of the levers of power.

Other influential writers of the time make connections between poverty and vice and not knowing one's place. Joseph Townsend staked out an extreme position and described poor relief claimants as combining 'snuff, gin, vermin, insolence and abusive language'. He saw abolition of the Poor Law as a prerequisite to the hunger which would drive the poor to 'decency and civility, obedience and subjection' and once they acquired these virtues the poor would become suitable cases for charity.⁵⁹

In 1799 Sir Frederick Eden thought that the poor should re-assess their life style to fit their incomes. Eden also made a connection between lack of moral character and being in receipt of poor relief. In 'The State of the Poor' he argued that the poor had sufficient resources to lead a reasonable life, and that poor relief diminished the ambition of the receivers, and they became dependent. He was very critical of employment schemes such as Houses of Industry because they were unprofitable and poorly managed. If the poor learnt to curb their expenditure and learnt to save then they would prosper.⁶⁰ This self-help frame of mind had other effects on the

⁵⁷ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (New York: Knopf, 1984), Chapter 6.

⁵⁸ Patrick Colquhoun, *Treatise on Indigence* (J. Hatchard, 1806), p. 7.

⁵⁹ Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws by a Well-Wisher to Mankind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), Sections 4 and 14.

⁶⁰ Sir Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor: Or, a History of the Labouring Classes in England*, 3 vols. (London, B. & J. White, 1797).

poor. London charities like the Foundling Hospital and the Lambeth Asylum experienced a reduction in public subscription during the 1770s and 1780s. Instead, subscribers turned to organisations that promoted education, and other methods of self-help and self-improvement.⁶¹ Laqueur charts the rise of the Sunday School movement with a mission to improve public morals.⁶² In 1796 the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor was founded with the message that a more thrifty and moral style of life would produce a financial benefit.⁶³

Simultaneously with public concern about the cost and validity of poor relief was a growing interest in economics and economic theory as espoused by Malthus. In his 'Essay on the Principle of Population' he argued that population would outstrip resources in the long run, unless there were checks on the rise in population. The checks he advocated were restrictions of income including poor relief (because more money encouraged large families) and moral restraint (by which he meant sexual restraint because that meant later marriages and fewer children). He argued that once the Poor Laws were removed, the poor would by necessity change their lifestyle. His attitude to poor relief changed over time, and became increasingly draconian. In 1798 he advocated the abandonment of the Old Poor Law relief practices except county workhouses which should be uncomfortable and provide work for paupers. By this time it was clear in Shropshire that Houses of Industry were not successful.

By 1803 Malthus' views had hardened and he now rejected workhouses and parish employment schemes. At this time he produced a scheme to gradually remove poor

⁶¹ D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 156.

⁶² Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture, 1780 – 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 184 - 204.

⁶³ J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795 – 1834* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 97.

relief altogether. This began by eliminating relief for new-born children which he believed would force parents to support their families. His theme was that the poor must overcome their economic problems by moral virtue and fortitude. In addition he argued that charities needed to be more discriminating in their benevolence because indiscriminate charity was as pernicious as poor relief. His advice to charity givers was to offer charity to the worthy, who would be grateful and presumably recognise their place in the social hierarchy.⁶⁴

Literature Review

The task of historians of the Poor Laws can be very complex. This is partly because the task demands an understanding of the national political issues that influenced decisions about poverty. It is also difficult because of the diversity and complexity of implementation of central government's laws, and what happened in one parish or one Union did not necessarily occur in another. If policies are implemented differently the historian has to decide on the reasons for this, be they political or economic, the result of community leaders' attitudes and beliefs that transcended the practicalities of poor relief, or the pressure of economic factors beyond the communities' control. Even within the relief system operating in one small community, some paupers, or categories of paupers were treated differently to others. The historian needs to consider local and national attitudes to gender, age, illness, disability and the causes and solutions to poverty, and also the financial aspects of providing poor relief. Therefore not surprisingly historians approach the Poor Laws from different angles and starting points, and with different preconceptions.

⁶⁴ G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (Faber, 1985), pp. 100 – 146.

This chapter aims to navigate a path through the literature of the Poor Law, with particular reference to the poverty of children in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Initially, it will concentrate on the work of historians of the philosophical ideas leading up to the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act.⁶⁵ Then it will concentrate on historians of the early 20th century who offered a critique of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws (1832 – 1834) and the Poor Law Amendment Act. This is followed by historians writing later in the twentieth century, who expand the debate on allowances in aid of wages and the evidence of the Royal Commission. This will be followed by an examination of the work of Lees and Snell who wrote about both Old and New Poor Laws and the similarities and differences of the two systems. Then it will concentrate on the work of historians who write about the manner in which the New Poor Law was implemented.

This thesis is fundamentally concerned about children, and Crompton, Humphries, Heywood and Cunningham write about adult concepts of childhood, children's experience of the old and new poor laws, and issues such as illegitimacy and the role of women *vis-à-vis* family poverty. This thesis is also a local study and draws on other local studies of Kent, London, and Yorkshire and on historians of Shropshire.

Philosophers and political economists have influenced welfare policy in the past. In *An End to Poverty* Gareth Stedman Jones illustrates different facets of Adam Smith's work, and confirms that Smith was more than a free-market fundamentalist.⁶⁶

Buoyed by Smith's more economically egalitarian writings and the political possibilities envisaged by the French Revolution, Condorcet and Thomas Paine

⁶⁵ 4 and 5 Will. 4C. 76.

⁶⁶ G. Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Columbia University Press, 2008).

proposed measures like social insurance and free public education. These were designed to eliminate poverty and encourage personal independence and equality.⁶⁷

There was a conflict between political economists such as Adam Smith, Ricardo, Malthus and Nassau Senior on the one side, and the evangelical humanitarians on the other side.⁶⁸ The economists believed in 'natural laws' which determined how a successful society operated, and which could not be flouted, while the humanitarians believed that suffering had to be alleviated. The clash between the two thought systems focussed on welfare policy, particularly poor relief. Humanitarians held sway in the second half of the eighteenth century, while later the political economists gained influence with market systems applied rigorously in the form of the 1834 Act. Cowherd views Bentham's idea of managerialism as providing a middle way between the humanitarians and the economists. In this contrapuntal style he describes the poor law debates between 1790 and 1834 in a similar vein to Poynter, who contrasts the ideas of Bentham and Malthus as they attempted to solve the pauperism crisis of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Poynter sees beyond Bentham's controversial ideas such as advocating Panopticon workhouses, less eligibility, child labour and badges for the poor to recognise Bentham's caring view of the poor and how social planning could eliminate pauperism.⁶⁹

In *The Idea of Poverty* Himmelfarb gives a description of the problem of poverty between the years 1750 – 1850 as viewed by politicians, economists and philosophers, novelists and journalists of the time.⁷⁰ Himmelfarb is seeking to establish why and how the image of poor and poverty changed at the time of the New

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 20 – 24.

⁶⁸ R. G. Cowherd, *Political Economists and the English Poor Laws* (Ohio University Press, 1977).

⁶⁹ J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism* (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1969).

⁷⁰ G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty, England in the Early Industrial Age* (Faber, 1985).

Poor Law and how that influenced society's search for a solution to poverty. At the heart of the book is the ambiguity in the word 'poor': in that a society can have different categories of poor, able-bodied 'labouring poor' but also the very young, the sick and the old and the indigent poor. Is it reasonable and rational to treat them the same?

After the Poor Law Amendment Act there was a lack of significant critiques of the new system until the advent of John and Barbara Hammond's *The Village Labourer* in 1911 and the literally voluminous works by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, published in the late 1920s.⁷¹ The Hammonds contradicted the 1832 – 1834 Report, in its assertions about the outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers, by arguing that Speenhamland-type relief was a reasonable reaction to the economic plight of rural labourers, caused by enclosures and exacerbated by the 1795 crisis, which resulted in a substantial decline in labourers' wages purchasing power. Their view is that the Report elevated the status of allowances in aid of wages out of proportion to their importance. The Webbs' work is larger and more comprehensive than the Hammonds, but agreed with them on the reasons for the plight of the agricultural worker. The Webbs' critique of the 1834 Act centred on the failure to recognise and deal with the causes of pauperism, and the principle of less eligibility. They accused the Report's Commissioners of having a pre-determined outcome and selecting the evidence to support that outcome, and not seeking to prevent destitution.

A potential problem with writing (and reading) general histories that have a long time span is that such writing can become an administrative record, with little attention given to the experiences of people, who were often disenfranchised and highly

⁷¹ J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760 – 1832* (1912, New York: Longmans, 1978); S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government* (Longmans, Green, 1927).

susceptible to political changes against their interests. Lyn Hollen Lees writes a wide-ranging description of the Poor Laws encompassing the centuries from the late seventeenth century to the twentieth.⁷² Despite the wide subject matter she manages to convey the sense that she is writing about people and institutions and not offering an administrative study. She emphasises how at times social solidarity allowed poverty to unite communities.

There was a movement in the thinking of the landed class and intellectuals away from the communitarian attitudes of the early eighteenth century to a capitalist rural economy. The capitalist rural economy was characterised by seasonal unemployment, the decline of farm service and enclosures. Snell (1985) writes about seasonal unemployment, the decline of farm service, apprenticeships of men and women, the family, enclosures and the Poor Law, from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth.⁷³ This is based largely on settlement records. During that period he describes the comprehensive attack on the agricultural workers' standard of living, not merely expressed in wages, but also in the decline of customary rights, the expansion of seasonal unemployment, the lack of work for women, the decline of farm service and cottage industries. He recognises this as a radical change from a moral economy to an agrarian capitalism.

A radical assessment of allowances in aid of wages systems was presented by Karl Polanyi, writing in 1944.⁷⁴ He argued that those systems were instituted by the squirearchy to manage the labour market to their benefit, and to avoid raising agricultural wages as a result of industrialisation. Another advantage to farmers and their landlords was that relief maintained a pool of labour to be called upon at peak

⁷² L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁷³ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Beacon Press, 2001).

periods. Polyani also argued that allowances enabled farmers' labour costs to be partly borne by ratepayers. His ideas were echoed by Hobsbawm and Rudé who viewed allowances as an attempt to maintain the elevated position of the squirearchy, and Thompson writing in 1963, re-iterated Polyani's views in *The Making of the English Working Class*.⁷⁵

There is a debate among historians about the different experiences for paupers of the Old Poor Law before 1834 and the New Poor Law after that date. Within that debate is another concerning the evidence presented to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1832 – 1834 and the conclusions the Commissioners drew from it. Mark Blaug in his 1963 and 1964 articles presented a revisionist view of the Old Poor Law and the 1832 – 1834 Report.⁷⁶ In the latter article he analysed the Rural Queries section of the Report and used his conclusions to reinforce the more theoretical arguments of the first article. His arguments were that increased relief costs occurred because of seasonal unemployment, the decline of local industries and a succession of bad harvests. The system of allowance in aid of wages was not a predominant form of relief and was generally ended by 1832. Also he stated that agricultural wages and therefore diet were insufficient for agricultural workers' energy expenditure. Blaug's general arguments were also supported by Daniel Baugh, who wrote that relief expenditure decreased or increased as a result of economic conditions.⁷⁷ Baugh also wrote that poor rates in Speenhamland and non-

⁷⁵ E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1991), pp. 247 – 248.

⁷⁶ M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *Journal of Economic History* 23: (1963), pp. 151 – 184; M. Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Re-examined', *Journal of Economic History* 24, (1964) pp. 229 – 245.

⁷⁷ D. A. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790 – 1834', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, 28, February 1975, pp. 50 – 68.

Speenhamland parishes were generally similar. High poor rates were the result of the agricultural depression of 1815 to 1824.

A contrary view is offered by Karel Williams, who makes some powerful assertions supported by quantitative evidence. He criticises Mark Blaug and argues that allowances were very important to the poor up until 1834. He also emphasises discontinuity of outdoor relief after 1834 when many historians argue something approaching the opposite, and comments adversely on the notion of sub-topics such as pauper education and medical relief. Another criticism of contemporary thinking involves the deterrent nature of the workhouse for able-bodied men, and he argues that the deterrent nature is proved by the lack of able-bodied males in the house.

Anne Digby while writing about the New Poor Law in Norfolk, offered insights into rural poor relief generally by identifying the dominant role of labour-hiring farmers in local poor relief. She wrote that farmers in Norfolk used the Poor Law system to maintain a pool of labour during the winter at low cost, so the labourers could be employed at peak times.⁷⁸

The Poor Law Amendment Act was passed at a time when the modern-style economy was being formed, both in agriculture and industry, and Boyer focuses on the century 1750 – 1850, when poor relief transformed itself from being fairly generous to the time when attitudes to the poor had hardened.⁷⁹ His early chapters elucidate relief systems and the historiographical debate on poor relief. In later chapters he writes that outdoor relief did not have negative effects on unemployment or raise poor rates, and that workhouses did not reduce unemployment and he

⁷⁸ A. Digby, 'The Labour Market and the Continuity of Social Policy after 1834: The Case of the Eastern Counties', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series (1975), 28, pp. 69 – 83; 'The Rural Poor Law' in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976); *Pauper Palaces* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁷⁹ G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the Poor Laws, 1750 – 1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

examines poor relief effects on birth rates and on rural-urban migration. He also argues that from 1760 after an increase in wheat prices and the decline in cottage industry, farmers used out-relief as unemployment benefit for labourers to enable them to continue employing seasonal workers.

The workhouse was the emblematic symbol of the Poor Law Amendment Act. Its architectural prison-like style and its less-eligible regime was designed to inspire dread and to compel the able-bodied to find work at any wage in preference to entering it. This reputation is written about in Henriques' article on Poor Law cruelty, which attempts to strike a balance between two viewpoints on the New Poor Law.⁸⁰ One viewpoint is that it was excessively cruel and deliberately so, and another which argues the other case, suggesting that isolated scandals and cruelties were the exception. The latter case was put by David Roberts (1963) in an earlier article.⁸¹ Henriques argues that Roberts was correct to criticise the exaggeration of cruelty and scandalous behaviour. She argues that if the New Poor Law was not designed to be cruel, it was certainly not generous, and the workhouse regime was often self-defeating. She concludes by arguing that despite the mitigating efforts of some Guardians and Union officers, the New Poor Law was class legislation based on class interest. Both these articles contain issues pertinent to Shropshire.

Samantha Shave discusses a variety of issues.⁸² Her chapter on the New Poor Law Bridgwater Union has a medical theme, but her conclusions on parsimonious Guardians underfunding their medical services resonate with some Boards of

⁸⁰ U. Henriques, 'How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?', *Journal of Economic History* xxiii (1964).pp. 229 – 245.

⁸¹ D. Roberts, 'How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?', *Historical Journal* Vol 16 Issue C1 March 1963.

⁸² S. Shave, 'The Dependent Poor?', *Rural History* Volume 20 Issue 01, April 2009, pp. 67 – 97; 'The Impact of Sturges Bourne's Poor Law Reforms in Rural England', *The Historical Journal* Volume 56 Issue 02 June 2013, pp. 399 – 429; 'The welfare of the vulnerable in the late 18th and early nineteenth centuries: Gilbert's Act of 1782', *Institute of Historical Research* (October 2008), www.history.ac.uk.

Guardians' attitudes to all Union expenditure.⁸³ Her article on the poor of Motcombe, Dorset, from 1800 – 1832 shows that poor people's dependency on relief fluctuated. Increased demands on the poor, such as expanding families, did not have a uniform effect on the poor's need for relief.⁸⁴ Shave analyses the Gilbert Act and the Sturges Bourne Acts and shows that both Acts had significance for the treatment of the poor. Certainly both Acts had significant effects on poor relief in Shropshire, particularly Gilbert's Act. Shave considers the nature of poor relief scandals, in the context of medical relief in the Bridgwater Union.⁸⁵

Akin to Shave's work, Price writes about the issue of medical negligence during the New Poor Law, and places the responsibility for it squarely at the feet of the underfunding of the Poor Law Medical Service.⁸⁶ The underfunding produced overworked, underpaid part-time medical officers, often working for employers not committed to Poor Law Medical Services and subservient to non-medical experts. At the same time, Medical Officers served a pauper clientele that needed their services more than most of the population because of health problems resulting from poverty. An inability to meet patients' needs led to low morale and negligence. Price uses the Isle of Wight workhouse as a local study to illuminate his general conclusions.⁸⁷

The tensions of the multi-purpose workhouse are further explored by Crowther who perceives the Poor Law Amendment Act and the resulting system of workhouses as essentially a part of the increasing institutionalisation of society, which included

⁸³ S. Shave, 'Immediate Death or a Life of Torture are the Consequences of the System: The Bridgwater Union Scandal and Policy Change', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz, *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2014).

⁸⁴ S. Shave, 'The Dependent Poor?', *Rural History* Volume 20 Issue 01, April 2009, pp. 67 – 97.

⁸⁵ S. Shave, 'Immediate Death or a Life of Torture are the Consequences of the System: The Bridgwater Union Scandal and Policy Change', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz, *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2014), p. 22.

⁸⁶ K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 138 – 149.

hospitals, asylums, prisons, and schools. Within that context she writes that the oft-reported problems and abuses of the workhouse were the product of institutional care, and that physical cruelty was not essentially part of the practice of workhouses. The chief problem of the institution was the lack of freedom and the daily tedium for the inmates. She describes the early working or non-working practice of the 1834 Act as like 'watching an elaborately designed machine fail to start'. With the interaction between national policies and local action, and the 'irresolvable tension' of the conflicting demands placed upon the workhouse and its staff it is not surprising that it quickly evolved.⁸⁸

'The workhouse was clearly not designed for paupers; it was rather designed for their management.' This quotation comes from the introduction to *Power and Pauperism* by Felix Driver.⁸⁹ This book deals initially with one of the ambiguities of Poor Law historiography, in which the Poor Law Amendment Act is seen as both an early attempt at government intervention in social affairs, and also as an aid to the operation of a free economic market. This develops into an examination of the geography of post-1834 poor relief, indicating the influence exerted by local communities in the varied operation of the system. The book is based on a geographical frame of analysis and contains discussions on boundaries, location and administrative landscapes. He examines the spatial segregation of paupers made available with the advent of workhouses, and their segregation from the rest of the community.

Another writer with a partially geographical approach is Steve King and his research leads him to the conclusion that England can be separated into two regions by a line

⁸⁸ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834 – 1929* (London: Methuen, 1983).

⁸⁹ F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 13.

drawn from the East Riding, through Lincolnshire, Warwickshire, East Somerset and Exeter.⁹⁰ The area to the east of the line is described as 'south and east' and the area to the west is described as 'north and west'. The south and east had a more generally benevolent system of poor relief, and the north and west had a harsher system. Of the two regions King argues that the south and east supported the largest number of relief claimants and provided more generous benefits. He suggests that this occurred because of cultural influences, and cannot be explained by the usual historical approaches to the Poor Law. King indicates that he has drawn heavily on local sources, and argues that more local studies (such as this thesis) are needed to inform the national picture.

During the implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act there was significant opposition to it. This took place largely in the north of England, though it also affected Wales, leading to the Rebecca Riots – and also Shropshire, where Incorporations proved difficult to influence and some newly-formed unions clung to old practices. John Knott writes that the New Poor Law was not the only cause of working-class concern, but also took its place among mechanisation of factories, the disappointments of the 1832 Reform Act, and the 1833 Factory Act.⁹¹ The New Poor Law seemed in the north to be yet another part of an attack on the working class. Workers in handicraft trades and women took the lead in opposition. Largely absent were actual paupers. Examining the same events as Knott, Edsall writes that the anti-poor law movement was only a failure if judged by unrealistic criteria.⁹²

The idea of local magnates having a large measure of control of local poor relief arrangements is considered in an exchange between Anthony Brundage, Peter

⁹⁰ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700 – 1850* (Manchester University Press, 2000), passim.

⁹¹ J. Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (Croom Helm, 1986), passim.

⁹² N. C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834 – 44* (Manchester University Press, 1971).

Dunkley, and Brundage again.⁹³ In this exchange Brundage wrote that the New Poor Law was not characteristic of or part of 'the Revolution in Government' and that Poor Law Unions incorporated 'deference communities'. Local landowners could also benefit from weighted voting and had influence over Union boundaries. In Shropshire, Atcham and Bridgnorth Unions were dominated by the largest local landowners who led their respective Unions to implement different policies to each other.

The primary purpose of the 1834 reform of the Poor Law was to target the able-bodied seeking relief and much of the literature reflects that by concentrating on the effect of the New Poor Law on adults. There are, though, issues concerning children that deserve consideration, work patterns of poor children, their education and their health. Some writers, such as Digby, rarely mention children (she has no index entry for child or children) but Crompton in *Workhouse Children* writes that the life of children in the workhouse was materially better than life outside the workhouse.⁹⁴

The exception to this is the lack of freedom which was an integral part of childhood workhouse life. Crompton advances the argument that a child's life in the workhouse was better than outside, with adequate accommodation, plentiful but repetitive food, health care and education, and apprenticeships to assist their rite of passage into adulthood. The book has a sense of being written in a historical vacuum with limited reference to secondary literature.

Children and their experiences are the subject of Jane Humphries' book which draws on 617 working-class autobiographies and investigates their work, not their

⁹³ A. Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 87, No. 342, (January 1972); P. Dunkley, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law – a critical note', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 349 (October 1973); A. Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law, a reply', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 355 (April 1975).

⁹⁴ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997).

pauperism.⁹⁵ There is controversy over using such autobiographies, because of their potential inaccuracy but she argues very well that childhood memories have generally proved accurate even if middle-age memories can be sanitised or self-justificatory. The sheer number of autobiographies used makes general accuracy very likely, she argues.⁹⁶ Her book only mentions girls as supporters of males, in the shape of sisters, mothers and aunts.

Children's experiences of poverty are a part of children's experiences as a whole, and while the experience of children in poor families is radically different to children in rich families, there are similarities in society's attitudes to children that are common to both groups. Rite of passage to adulthood is one of those issues. When does a child become an adult? Is the conception of promotion to adulthood gender neutral, and who decides the relative merits of child labour versus education? Heywood and Cunningham write about changing concepts of childhood and how that has affected children's life experiences as legislation has promoted children's interests.⁹⁷ In Heywood's book he discusses the concept of the 'natural' or 'universal' child moulded by biology. Alternatively children adapt to their environment, and are therefore a result of adult expectations, which are in turn a product of economic, historical and cultural forces. In the sub-section on children at work he identifies the early modern period when most families expected children to work and it was not until compulsory schooling in 1880 and labour legislation that the idea of working children became questionable. Working in their own home or domestic duties such as child-minding or helping in the fields, particularly at harvest time seemed to be more acceptable to

⁹⁵ J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge 2011).

⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 5, 6.

⁹⁷ C. Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Polity, 1988); H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Routledge, 2005); H. Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (B.B.C., 2006).

reformers than factory work. Was the opposition to child labour in the nineteenth century evidence of a compassionate value system, or did it impose a bourgeois notion of childhood on a proletarian society? These issues are addressed in *The Invention of Childhood* and *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, written by Hugh Cunningham.⁹⁸ The later book is a comparative study of European childhood over five centuries and engages with child and family poverty. He views the eighteenth century as the watershed in adult concepts of childhood, influenced by Rousseau and the Romantic poets. Hopkins concentrates on the experiences of working class children, and how those changed during the nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Much of the book concerns children's experience of industrial work, and latterly, school, but there are substantial sections on children in agricultural employment, and children in the care of the Poor Law Unions.

Illegitimacy, bastardy clauses and the treatment of unmarried mothers was an important issue during at least the early years of the New Poor Law. It is an important issue primarily because of its adverse effect on mothers and children, but also because it was an example of the Poor Law Commissioners ignoring the evidence of Rural and Town Queries and producing proposals based on political and moral dogma. Thomas Nutt analyses this issue in his article.¹⁰⁰ He shows that making mothers take total responsibility for illegitimate children contradicted the actions of parochial practice, which was based on mothers of illegitimate children being the primary carers with the father providing financial support. The Malthusian desire to make unmarried mothers solely responsible for children, and to enter the

⁹⁸ H. Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (B.B.C., 2006); *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Routledge, 2005).

⁹⁹ E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed* (Manchester University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ T. Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *Economic History Review*, 63, 2 (2010), pp. 335 – 361.

workhouse if they could not survive without relief, was not solely a response to popular and middle-class attitudes, but a function of the Commissioners' political and demographic pre-conceptions. Nutt writes that the background to the treatment of this issue is a fear of lower class sexuality, particularly of women. This latter idea is confirmed by Lees and Mason.¹⁰¹ On the role of putative fathers the Commissioners were unequivocally clear: 'in affirming the inefficiency of human legislation to enforce restraints upon licentiousness by Providence, we have implied our belief that all punishment of the father is useless'.¹⁰²

There was considerable condemnation of the inequity of the new bastardy clauses from across the country but particularly from the northern counties, who were generally unwilling to implement aspects of the New Poor Law. The result was a change in the law in 1844 which restored to unmarried mothers a right to an affiliation order, but of not more than 2s. 6d. per week and the woman had to provide corroborative evidence of the identity of the child's father.

Cody reinforces Nutt's stance on illegitimacy but politicises the issue.¹⁰³ She contrasts the Liberal and Whig criticism of single mothers whom they regarded as pests and manipulative, with the view of radicals and some Tories who regarded single mothers as unable to cope in a capitalist marketplace. The 'Liberals' saw mothers of illegitimate children as the cause of overpopulation. Opponents of the New Poor Law viewed attacks on single mothers as a proxy for the destruction of traditional social relations. Lifestyle poverty was an important issue for children, and

¹⁰¹ L. H. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: the English poor laws and the people, 1700 – 1948* (Cambridge, 1998); M. Mason, *The making of Victorian sexuality* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰² T. Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *Economic History Review*, 63, 2 (2010), 339; Parliamentary Paper, Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1834, p. 482.

¹⁰³ L. Cody, 'The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Winter) 2000.

while old-age poverty is not germane to this thesis the work of Pat Thane is significant for an understanding of life-cycle poverty.¹⁰⁴

Micro-histories and local studies are particularly important to a subject like the Poor Law because while shaped by legislation and central authorities, it was implemented locally, and implemented differently in different localities. Before the advent of modern global communications, rural communities would have been isolated and diverse and one of the advantages of micro-histories is that they describe that diversity. Barry Reay's *oeuvre* is a good example of writing about rural communities. *Rural Englands* is a description of rural working communities and argues that there is no over-arching Rural England but as localisation was a considerable force, there was a succession of Englands.¹⁰⁵ He concentrates on the north and west of England in contrast to other historians' emphasis on the south and east. Also, he writes about women and children workers and the decline of women's work, and about rural industry and household survival strategies in the countryside.

Reay shows a strong commitment to local history in *Microhistories, Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800 – 1930*.¹⁰⁶ One can be seduced by the title into imagining this to be a different style of book but it is a local history of three parishes, Boughton-under-Blean, Dunkirk and Hernhill in Kent. He has used a wide range of evidential resources, court cases, probate records, newspapers, school attendance records, oral history, poor relief records and census returns, in addition to more visual techniques. His subject matter is wide-ranging and includes fertility,

¹⁰⁴ P. Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop* No. 6 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 29 and 31- 51; P. Thane and L. Botelho, *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500* (Women and Men in History, Routledge, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ B. Reay, *Rural Englands* (Palgrave, 2004).

¹⁰⁶ B. Reay, *Microhistories: demography, society and culture in Rural England, 1800 – 1930* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 129.

health, social economy, class, families, literacies and sexuality. Reay's chapter on social economy features survival strategies and the use of credit, and shows that changes of work and workplace were common. His conclusions on reliance on poor relief are significant, with 60% of labourers and small farmers seeking relief during the winter months in the 1830s. The Old Poor Law returns show generous relief payments in accord with Steve King's conclusions.¹⁰⁷

Continuing with the theme of local studies, much of the historical writing about Shropshire is about great buildings, and occasionally great men. Against that trend are the works of Lance Smith and Barrie Trinder. Of the local publications only Lance Smith has written about the Poor Laws in any depth.¹⁰⁸ His major work is a historical and architectural description of Shropshire workhouses in both Old and New Poor Laws. Smith is an architect and his writing on workhouses focuses on them as buildings rather than on the people in them.

Trinder has written *Yeomen and Colliers*, which is an analysis of Probate Inventories for four industrial parishes around Wellington from 1650 – 1750, and *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* which when published in 1973 did much to raise perceptions of Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale as places of great importance for economic historians.¹⁰⁹ People familiar with Shrewsbury will know that the centre of the town is contained within a loop of the Severn, crossed in the east by English Bridge and in

¹⁰⁷ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700 – 1850* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 254 – 269.

¹⁰⁸ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII (2007), pp. 1 - 125.

¹⁰⁹ B. Trinder, *A History of Shropshire* (Phillimore, 1998); B. Trinder and J. Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (Phillimore, 1980); B. Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* (Billing, 1981).

the west by Welsh Bridge. Trinder has written *Beyond the Bridges* which is an account of the expansion of the town outside of the bridges from 1760 – 1960.¹¹⁰

Vincent Walsh's Ph. D. thesis examined the end of the Old and the beginning of the New Poor Law in the Vale of the Severn around Ellesmere, Shrewsbury and the coalfield in the north-east of the county (modern-day Telford).¹¹¹ Dodd has written a history of Shropshire Agriculture in the nineteenth century.¹¹²

While Shropshire was a predominantly agricultural region in the nineteenth century with a network of market towns the north-east of the county contained coal deposits, iron ore, limestone, and wood for charcoal burning. The development of that region is recorded by Arthur Raistrick through the lives of the extended Darby family. The *Dynasty of Iron Founders* was the extended family of the Darbys of Coalbrookdale.¹¹³ The Darby family, who were Quakers, originally ran businesses near Bristol but Abraham Darby I bought the Iron Works at Coalbrookdale in 1709 or 1710. From the early seventeenth century Coalbrookdale raised 95% of Shropshire's coal. The new works were also situated adjacent to the River Severn which was a river used for commerce.

Negrine in Leicester, Crompton in Worcester and Marland in Wakefield and Huddersfield write about different aspects of the New Poor Law in provincial towns and cities.¹¹⁴ In her work on Leicester Union Workhouse Negrine rejects simplistic generalisations about workhouse medical officers provided by other historians of poor

¹¹⁰ B. Trinder, *Beyond the Bridges* (Phillimore, 2006).

¹¹¹ V. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire, 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1979, p. 57.

¹¹² J. Phillip Dodd, 'Shropshire Agriculture 1793 – 1870', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1981, pp. 14 – 16.

¹¹³ Arthur Raistrick, *Dynasty of Iron Founders – The Darbys and Coalbrookdale* (William Sessions Limited, The Ebor Press, York, 1989).

¹¹⁴ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997); H. Marland, *Medicine and society in Wakefield and Huddersfield 1780 – 1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

law medicine. The thesis chapter on Shropshire Poor Law medicine attempts to emulate Negrine by evaluating evidentially the work of Medical Officers such as Valentine at Ludlow.¹¹⁵ Siena and Boulton *et al* have written about medical services in London pre-1834, and David Green has written a comprehensive work on London and the Poor Law.¹¹⁶ By 1815 London had 25% of the country's workhouse inmates as parishes used indoor relief as a method to counteract the abuse of the system by paupers claiming outdoor relief from several parishes.

This thesis undertakes an understanding of the day-to-day lives of children under the care of the Shropshire Poor Law authorities. It follows decades of revisionist histories of the poor law and contributes to that tradition akin to the work of Crompton in Worcestershire. Shropshire is well placed to enable an understanding of the lives of poor children because of the varied nature of the county and the differing actions of influential Chairmen of Guardians.

The writers discussed in this chapter and the more closely targeted writing from other chapters provide a secure platform on which to construct an analysis of the lives of poor children in mid-nineteenth century Shropshire.

Poverty and Childhood

In a thesis devoted to poverty one of the primary tasks is to clarify what is meant by poverty and to establish procedures for identifying poor children. Sometimes other

¹¹⁵ A. Negrine, 'The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867 – 1914', *Family & Community History*, Vol. 13/1, May 2010, pp. 34 – 44; A. Negrine, 'Practitioners and Paupers: Medicine at the Leicester Union Workhouse, 1867 – 1905', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013).

¹¹⁶ J. Boulton, R. Davenport and L. Schwarz, 'These Ante-Chambers of the Grave', included in *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013); D. Green, *Pauper Capital* (Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

writers' definition of those who are poor is synonymous with those within the Poor Law system. For the purposes of this thesis, though, there is a need to be more explicit in our conceptual analysis. This thesis will examine the varied lives of children in the workhouse, children as part of families on out-relief, children as apprentices, children as wage-earners and children as part of families who whilst poor, were not part of the poor law system. It is important to have a concept of poverty and what it meant to be poor that can unify children with these various experiences.

Poverty Line

One of the methods used to identify the poor is to define a 'poverty line', which describes a standard of living below which one is identified as poor. For example, from 2008 the World Bank proposed that \$1.25 a day be taken as a poverty line below which indicates a person living in poverty. In 2015 that poverty line was raised to \$1.90.¹¹⁷ Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen responded to the World Bank poverty line by advocating a Multi-Dimensional Poverty Line which identified other factors such as sanitation, access to clean water, child mortality and access to education, in addition to income, as contributory factors in a person's poverty. Sen's definition of poverty produces startlingly different results to that of the World Bank. Using the World Bank criterion, about 40% of Ethiopians and Uzbekistanis are poor but using Sen's multi-dimensional criteria, Ethiopian poverty rises to 96% while Uzbekistan poverty plunges to 2%.¹¹⁸ This serves to show the complications of defining poverty.

¹¹⁷ www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/global-poverty-line-faq

¹¹⁸ D. Morrell, 'Who is Poor?' *Harvard Magazine*, January – February 2011.

Poverty as defined by historians

For historians, defining poverty and the poor is equally difficult and proxies are often sought. Charles Booth used School Board data which he extrapolated for the non-school age population.¹¹⁹ Some seventeenth century history writers have identified poor people in various communities. Tim Wales emphasises the importance of poor relief in the mid-seventeenth century, particularly at certain stages of the life cycle. He shows that 40% of individuals received poor relief at some stage in their life, and that the 1601 legislation was designed to relieve life-cycle poverty.¹²⁰ Newman Brown has undertaken family reconstruction in Aldenham in Hertfordshire for 1630 – 1690 and confirms the life cycle nature of poor relief, by showing that little relief was dispensed to individuals in the age range 15 – 30 years.¹²¹ Like Wales, he shows that Aldenham had ‘very wide terms of relief and (relief) intruded into so many aspects of parish life.’¹²² As a result 36.4% of heads of households were relieved by the parish in 1681.¹²³

Tom Arkell raises interesting issues regarding identification of poor people in his work on Warwickshire parishes in the late seventeenth century. If one defined poverty as equivalent to receiving relief, then 10% of the population would be in poverty. Arkell also considers exemption from paying the Hearth Tax as a criterion for poverty but raises issues with the Hearth Tax rolls as accurate, though concludes that in the Warwickshire parishes the rolls were effectively accurate. Criteria for exemption

¹¹⁹ R. O'Day and D. Englander, *Mr. Charles Booth's Inquiry: Life and Labour of the People in London Reconsidered* (A & C Black, 1992), passim.

¹²⁰ T. Wales, ‘Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle’, in R. Smith (ed.) *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹²¹ W. Newman Brown, ‘The receipt of poor relief and life-cycle’, in R. Smith (ed.) *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 420.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

from paying the tax is also an issue when considering exemption as an identifier of poverty, and here Arkell writes that exemption criteria, while exempting 35%, included some who were not obviously poor. As a principle he writes that poverty cannot be described in isolation but 'must entail both an understanding of how the bottom layers of society fare relative to the others.'¹²⁴

Snell discusses criteria for assessing the standard of living of labourers and rejects the superimposition of modern concepts of that. Instead, he argues that historians must 'comprehend and adapt the priorities of the contemporary labouring poor'.¹²⁵

Lees cautions against measuring poverty by the receipt of poor relief, and writes that local norms of wealth and poverty are pertinent.¹²⁶

Even the Poor Law Report of 1834 included the phrase 'The mischievous ambiguity of the word poor'.¹²⁷ Himmelfarb describes the journey of poverty from being a natural condition to a cause for concern for society.¹²⁸ In 1786 Joseph Townsend viewed hunger as aiding social order and Colquhoun in 1806 wrote that 'poverty is therefore a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society, without which nations and communities could not exist in a state of civilization. It is the lot of man'.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ T. Arkell, 'The incidence of poverty in England in the later seventeenth century', *Social History* Volume 12, No. 1., (1987).

¹²⁵ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 4.

¹²⁶ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 13.

¹²⁷ S. G. and E. O. A. Checkland (eds.), *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Pelican, 1974), p. 395.

¹²⁸ G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (Knopf, 1984).

¹²⁹ J. Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (1786), p. 27; P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise on Indigence* (J. Hatchard, 1806), p. 7.

Nineteenth century definitions of poverty

A definition of poverty was a practical problem for union relieving officers and Guardians who made decisions on who to relieve, and Guardians' definition(s) of poverty can be understood by analysing the circumstances of those who were relieved and those who were not.

For School Boards after 1870 a definition of poverty and the determining of a poverty line was also a practical issue, since the 1870 Education Act gave Boards permission to remit school fees for poor children.¹³⁰ That remission of fees required Boards to define a criterion on which to decide eligibility.¹³¹

In modern Britain and Europe the concept used to identify the poor is known as 'relative poverty'. In this system households' income is measured according to median income. Median income is the 'middle' income, such that half the people in a country have more than the median income, and half have less. In the European Union those people with an income of less than 60% of the median income are classified as poor.¹³²

In order to define poverty, either absolute or relative, one needs accurate statistics on income levels which are not available for the 1830s in any significant detail. Also, the Poor Law Commission and the Poor Law Board collected comprehensive statistics about expenditure but not accurate statistics on numbers of paupers relieved. The Commission only collected statistics for one quarter in every year and the Board only collected statistics on 1st January and 1st July each year. Those returns did not include the length of time of relief, since it could be one day or for the whole year.

¹³⁰ 33 and 34 Victoria C. 75, S.17.

¹³¹ A. Gillie, 'Identifying the Poor in the 1870s and 1880s', *Economic History Review*, 61, 2, (2008), pp. 302 – 305.

¹³² *Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2004*, European Union.

Also if a head of the family was offered relief then the whole family was viewed as paupers, and vice versa, if a child received relief then the head of household was also deemed to be receiving relief. However these Poor Law statistics were used to define 1.26 million paupers in 1834 (8.8% of the population), and in 1860 the figure had declined to 845,000 (4.3% of the population). The statistics of pauperism were to decline further and by 1900 only 2.5% of the population was in receipt of relief.¹³³ The view of the Poor Law Authorities was that a person's poverty was recognised by his/her request for relief. No matter how poor you were, if you didn't ask for relief, you were not recognised as poor. The poor law was not concerned with the poor, but with the destitute.¹³⁴ Thus to the Poor Law Authorities and other commentators poverty declined considerably in the second half of the nineteenth century. Unless you have a coherent and plausible definition of poverty, statistics like this can lack meaning. To emphasise this Charles Booth showed that 30% of the East London population had an income that was insufficient for their health.¹³⁵ Ten years later Seebohm Rowntree in York found 28% of the city's population to be poor using similar criteria. This is a stark contrast to the Poor Law Authorities recognition of 2% poverty nationally.¹³⁶ Even in 1848 Mayhew had evidence that 2,431 unemployed or virtually unemployed sought shelter in verminous London lodging houses rather than become workhouse inmates.¹³⁷

Clearly the Poor Law Authorities on one side and Booth and Rowntree on the other had very different concepts of what it was to be poor. If there is such divergence

¹³³ M. Rose, *The Relief of Poverty 1834 – 1914* (Macmillan, 1977), pp. 14 – 15.

¹³⁴ A. Gillie, 'Identifying the Poor in the 1870s and 1880s', *Economic History Review*, 61, 2, (2008), p. 302.

¹³⁵ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the Poor in London, 1902 – 1904*. (The first volume appeared in 1889.)

¹³⁶ B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (Macmillan, 1901).

¹³⁷ H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (Wordsworth Classics, 2008).

between the Poor Law Authorities and people investigating poverty on what constitutes poverty, there is no consensus of contemporary opinion or among historians on which this thesis can build. Nor are there adequate income statistics on which to make accurate decisions on either absolute or relative poverty lines, so it is necessary to devise another method. Relying solely on the Poor Law conviction that only receiving relief indicates poverty would be certain to greatly underestimate numbers of people in poverty. The people on relief do however provide a basis on which to identify some of the poor. In addition, it is appropriate to add those who were living on a standard or level equal to or below that of workhouse inmates or receivers of out-relief. There was considerable poverty amongst agricultural workers and their families, poverty which denied them the material advantages of workhouse life such as regular diet, access to adequate housing and some health care and education. Clearly workhouse life had considerable disadvantage for inmates but some of the above advantages were generally denied to the families of agricultural labourers if they did not apply for relief. For the purposes of this thesis, the children living in poverty will be defined as those receiving relief, either in a workhouse or on out-relief plus those not in receipt of relief but at the same material level or worse than those on relief.

Children

In order to assess the life experience of poor children in Shropshire it is important to engage in a conceptual analysis of the word 'child' in the context of mid-nineteenth century Britain. Essentially this means examining the upper age of childhood and the point at which a child becomes an adult. Crowther writes that initially the transition

age of adulthood was over 13 for both girls and boys.¹³⁸ That is the age at which they moved into adult workhouse wards. She also records that the age of transition increased for boys to over 15 and for girls to over 16 from 1842.

Kidd records that boys were moved to adult wards when over 13, and girls when over 16.¹³⁹ He also writes that this was revised in 1847 but does not indicate how. Driver writes that from 1842 boys became men in the workhouse when over 15 and girls became women over 15 years of age.¹⁴⁰ Crowther, Kidd and Driver used Circulars and Orders from the Poor Law Commission.

Crompton writes that in 1836 boyhood ended in the workhouse at age 13 and for girls at age 16.¹⁴¹ He suggests that girls stayed longer in child wards to avoid contamination with female 'undesirables'. According to Crompton, classification ages changed in 1838, so that both boys and girls stayed in children's wards until 15 years old. He cites the Poor Law Commission 5th Annual Report of 1838 as evidence for this, but he is mistaken, at least with the date of 1838, because the 5th Annual Report mentions neither children nor classification. Presumably this is a typographical error. Historians have, therefore, failed to clarify the issue of the age of transition between childhood and adulthood.

Examining the view of childhood exhibited by the Central Poor Law Authorities, the sources offer a confusing picture. In 1836 the Poor Law Commission did classify boys aged 13 and over as men, and classified girls of 16 and above as women.¹⁴² In 1842 the Commission reassessed classification ages and placed boys above the age of 15 in men's wards. These ages were confirmed by the 1847 Consolidated

¹³⁸ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System* (Methuen, 1983), p. 42.

¹³⁹ A. Kidd, State, *Society and the Poor in Nineteenth Century England* (Macmillan, 1999), p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ F. Driver, *Fifth Power and Pauperism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 64.

¹⁴¹ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997), p. 38.

¹⁴² Parliamentary Papers, 1836, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission, (595), p. 85.

General Order. The 1842 and 1847 documents do contain some loose wording and both speak of boys and girls 'above the age of 15 years' as adults, but also describe them 'under that of 15' as children. This is ambiguous and leaves it unclear as to whether a 15 year old is a child or an adult.¹⁴³ In 1854 the Poor Law Board explicitly produced lists headed 'children between 3 and 15' indicating that in the Board's view 15 year olds were children and 16 year olds were adults. However, the 1847 Consolidated General Order in its apprenticeship section says that 'no person above 14 years of age shall be so bound without his consent' This is significant if joining the workforce is perceived as a rite of passage. In Britain between 1834 and 1870 that was not the case, and children as young as 6 were engaged in either agricultural or industrial work.¹⁴⁴ During this period child labour was often viewed as a near-vital part of the household economy and family survival and not as a rite of passage.¹⁴⁵ The age at which children are allowed to leave school can often be a *de facto* arbiter of the transition from childhood to adulthood. However, late nineteenth century Education Acts placed the bar very low and the 1880 Act ended compulsory education at 10 years old, amended to 11 in 1893 and 12 in 1899.¹⁴⁶ In Atcham Union pauper parents were advised to send their 10 year old children out to work, with the unstated implication that if they did not it would jeopardise their relief. The justice system of the early nineteenth century treated children of a young age as if

¹⁴³ Parliamentary Papers, 1842, Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission, with appendices, (389), p. 48; Fourteenth Report of the Poor Law Commission with Appendices, 1847 – 1848 (960) Appendix A.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁵ P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750 – 1870* (Palgrave, 2003), pp. 6 and 7, footnote 13.

¹⁴⁶ E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed* (Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 239 – 241.

they were adults. In 1834 children as young as 10 were transported for seven years for minor crimes.¹⁴⁷

In conclusion, since this thesis deals with the lives of poor children, it seems appropriate to follow the age of transition set by the Poor Law Commission in the 1840s. This regards a 15 year old of either gender as still a child, and a 16 year old as an adult.

The structure of this thesis and key research questions

This thesis seeks to analyse and evaluate the quality of life of poor children in Shropshire in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. To do that it analyses the life chances of children living in three different sets of circumstances. Some poor children were part of the families of 'independent' labourers. These families independence was recognised as such because they made no claims on the poor law authorities. Some poor children lived in families that were supported by out-relief provided by the poor law unions. Some children were supported by the poor law unions by being inmates of Shropshire workhouses.

This thesis considers the quality of life in those three different sets of circumstances and evaluates which circumstances were materially more advantageous for poor children. There is not enough evidence to evaluate poor children's emotional or psychological responses to the three sets of life circumstances but it is possible to evaluate which circumstance better satisfied children's immediate needs and prepare them for successful future lives.

¹⁴⁷ J. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt, *Children in English Society, Volume II* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 352.

Chapter Two analyses the standard of living of Shropshire independent agricultural labourers and their families during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and it attempts to answer one key question. How poor were families of Shropshire independent agricultural labourers?

Chapter Three analyses the conditions in which children were kept in Shropshire workhouses. A significant fact is that there were large numbers of children in workhouses, as a proportion of all inmates. This is clearly shown in Appendices 1a, 1b and 1c and is doubly striking since the Royal Commission of 1832 – 1834 and the Poor Law Amendment Act largely concentrated on the workhouse *vis-à-vis* the able-bodied and unmarried mothers. The key question in Chapter 3 is how did Shropshire workhouses meet the needs of inmate children (who were not responsible for their own poverty) when the initial workhouse ethos was to deter relief claimants?

The education of poor children was important because uneducated or untrained children who lived in the workhouse or whose family received out-relief may well have been in danger of continuing that pauperism into adulthood. The Shropshire Unions provided education for those children in the workhouse and often paid for children of families on out-relief to obtain education. In Chapter 4 the key research questions about the education of poor children encompass the level of commitment of Unions to that education and the consistent quality of teaching and learning across the unions.

Some historians of medical provision during the middle decades of the nineteenth century emphasise the reluctance of guardians to fund adequately that medical provision, and a consequent lack of commitment and professionalism of poor law doctors. The key research questions in Chapter 5 regarding the quality of health care, particularly of children, concern the commitment shown by boards of guardians

to their medical services, and the ability and energy that Union medical officers brought to the care of their patients.

The Shropshire poor law unions were responsible for the well-being of many children in their workhouses and after 1844 they were responsible for organising the transition from workhouse to workplace. A key mechanism for this was apprenticeship. The difficulty for the historian is that the records concerning workhouse children and apprenticeships are sparse and offer limited opportunities to establish how Unions performed the task of helping poor children into the world of work. The key research questions in Chapter 6 about apprenticeships centre around the policies adopted by Shropshire Unions and how far they met the needs of children emerging into the workplace.

The use of workhouses was the flagship policy of the Poor Law Amendment Act and the resulting Poor Law Commission and Poor Law Board. Despite this, many more people were relieved via out-relief than were relieved in the workhouse. Out-relief was a more economical way of relieving people, particularly families, and also was more flexible, than relieving families in the workhouse.¹⁴⁸

In Chapter 7 the issues concern the fairness of out-relief distribution, the generosity of payments, and the life-chances of those children in poor families in receipt of out-relief. The key question, though, is how far the outdoor relief payments met the needs of families? Within that overarching question are sub-questions about Shropshire Unions' views about out-relief *vis-à-vis* using the workhouse to offer relief, and whether industrial and agricultural unions operated different policies.

¹⁴⁸ M. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law' in *Economic History Review*, Volume 19, Issue 3, pp. 607 – 620,

This exploration of issues and key research questions for individual chapters is expanded considerably in the respective chapters, with a wider range of research questions affecting the subject matter of each chapter.

Beyond this is an overarching question of whether poor Shropshire children's material needs were best met as family members of independent labourers, as members of families receiving out-relief, or as inmates of the workhouse.

Chapter 2

Shropshire and the Standard of Living of Shropshire Agricultural Labourers in the Middle Decades of the nineteenth Century

This chapter is designed to provide a context within which Shropshire child poverty can be examined. To do that it will analyse the standard of living of Shropshire agricultural workers, and describe the introduction of the New Poor Law to Shropshire.

Explorations of living standards, as with the earlier discussion of poverty, are multi-faceted and the secondary literature reflects that. The significance for many Shropshire children is that they were members of families with a breadwinner, or breadwinners, engaged in low-paid occupations during a time of considerable economic and agricultural change. While not writing specifically about Shropshire, the secondary literature comments on the distress of the labouring poor caused by the ripple effect of the Industrial Revolution, the application of capitalism to agriculture, the increase of population and seasonal unemployment. This was a time when the employment of women and children came under pressure, and historians such as Seccombe and Anna Clark write about the concept of the male or female breadwinner wage and its effect on diet. Agricultural labourers' diet is also discussed by Shammass, Gurney, and Nicholas and Oxley, including the effect of diet on

women's stature. The means of improving that diet by working allotments is explored by Burchardt.¹⁴⁹

Snell writes about the poverty of the labouring poor, seasonal unemployment and the differentiation of gendered economic roles.¹⁵⁰ Labourers' poverty was exacerbated by the effects of enclosure and is part of the supersession of the moral economy by the market economy. To establish his evidence for seasonality of employment he analysed settlement examinations. Snell writes about the 'standard of living debate' and its lack of awareness of regional diversities and for taking 'modern criteria on priorities and superimposing them onto the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.¹⁵¹

He opposes the views of J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mingay who argued for optimism in living standards, and describes the plight of the agricultural labourers' families after 1750. There was a growth in seasonal unemployment, initially among women and after the 1790s, among men, without compensatory rises in wages in the summer months. This growth was linked to the rise of the rural population, developments in technology and an increase in grain production in eastern England. Allied to this was the decline of service in agriculture. Enclosures, while not leading to a large increase in smallholding, also worked against the interests of poor labouring families. He writes about various issues including poor law, the limits of in-service and apprenticeship, limited access to land and the emergence of a proletariat, changes to the life of families connected to employment patterns, particularly underemployment.

¹⁴⁹ C. Shammass, 'The eighteenth-century English diet and economic change', *Explorations in Economic History*, 21 (1984), pp. 254 – 269; P. Gurney, 'Rejoicing in Potatoes: The Politics of Consumption in England During the 'Hungry Forties'', *Past and Present*, no. 203 (May 2009); S. Nicholas and D. Oxley, 'Living standards of women in England and Wales, 1785 – 1815: New evidence from Newgate prison records', *Economic History Review*, August 1996, Vol. 49 Issue 3, p. 591 – 599; J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1893* (The Royal Historical Society, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660 – 1900* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

The book concentrates on the 'South', generally coinciding with south of Caird's line of low and high wage counties.¹⁵² Caird's line bisects Shropshire east to west, showing the south and west of the country (Ludlow, Clun for example) as poor and the agricultural area to the north of the county as less poor with the coalfield of the north-east more prosperous.

Because of concentration in the south, Snell does not record wage rates in Shropshire but wages in Worcester and Hereford (immediately south of Shropshire) were 7s. 8d. and 8s. 5d. respectively for a week's agricultural work in 1850. Wales, immediately west of Shropshire, had 1850 wage rates of 6s. 11d. Wages for Worcestershire and Wales had declined by 20 – 25% since 1833. The average wage within a cluster of northern counties including Cheshire was 12s. 2d.

At a time of poverty for labourers and their families, Samantha Williams examines the manner in which Bedfordshire labouring families survived. She analyses how labouring families in Bedfordshire used varied strategies to ensure adequate resources for themselves.

Bedfordshire evidence to the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act 1837 shows that the families of labourers earning 9s. per week only lived on bread and potatoes. In 1837 income minus rent and fuel left families with 1s. 6d. per week. With high unemployment in the county, parish relief before 1834 was a significant part of household income. The standard of living of agricultural families in Bedfordshire has significance for Shropshire since Bedfordshire wage levels were equal to north

¹⁵² J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Forgotten Books, 2012), p. iv.

Shropshire but higher than south Shropshire. From the foundation of Bedfordshire Poor Law Unions, outdoor relief was reduced for almost all labouring families.¹⁵³

Caird showed that in the north of England labouring families fared better than those in the south.¹⁵⁴ Hunter tests this assertion in the context of the East Riding of Yorkshire. He shows that wage rates for agricultural labourers in the East Riding of Yorkshire were higher than found in the south of England.¹⁵⁵ In 1848 labourers earned approximately 12s. a week during the winter months and 13s. 6d. to 14s. during the summer months. He writes that these wage rates only sustained a low standard of living and for much of the labouring population the main breadwinner did not earn enough to support a family. Women's agricultural work earned between 10d. and 2s. a day depending on the season

The use of allotments began to occur when the economic conditions in the countryside made it advantageous.¹⁵⁶ In the decades either side of 1800 there was a very rapid population growth and exposure to market forces. This was particularly significant in agricultural areas because labour requirements grew more quickly in towns, and the effect of enclosure placed country people in the position of needing employment. The result of that was unemployment and underemployment and a reduction in wages close to subsistence levels. Under and unemployment enabled women and children to work on the allotment and with very low wages allotment produce could make an economic difference to labourers' families.

¹⁵³ S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History* (2005) 16, 1, pp. 21 – 52.

¹⁵⁴ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Forgotten Books, 2012), pp. 510 - 519.

¹⁵⁵ R. Hunter, 'Making Ends Meet: household survival strategies in the East Riding in the mid-nineteenth century', *The Local Historian*, February 2010.

¹⁵⁶ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1893* (The Royal Historical Society, 2011).

Burchardt identifies two occasions in which rural society was in crisis. One was the bad harvests of 1794 – 1796, and 1799 – 1801. The second was the Swing Riots of 1830 – 1831. These caused landowners to provide allotments, though not across the whole country. In southern England, where unemployment was greatest, allotments became plentiful. Burchardt explains the significant difference between allotments and potato grounds. Potato grounds were let by farmers at a market rent and usually only on a temporary basis (the length of the potato growing season). The farmer, being a tenant himself, may not have been able or willing to let land on a semi-permanent basis. Potato grounds were usually ploughed and often manured by the farmer whose land the potato ground was on, and were generally let to the farmer's employees. Potato ground became common from the 1790s. Allotments were let by landowners (rather than tenant farmers) on an annual basis that evolved into quasi-permanence, at a fair rent (the rent a farmer would have paid for that plot of land). Since allotments were more profitable than farm land the 'fair' rent was less than a market rent. Allotments were cultivated by spade husbandry provided by the family.

Some of the evidence for this chapter is provided by government reports and Verdon's analysis of the Poor Law Commission Report highlights the problems of using Government Reports as reliable evidence.¹⁵⁷ Much of the 1832 – 1834 report consists of Rural Queries, and Verdon writes that the questions were badly phrased resulting in difficulties in interpreting the answers. Some answers to questions are incomplete and ambiguous and their usefulness is dependent on shared understanding of terms.

¹⁵⁷ N. Verdon, 'The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: woman's and children's employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, LV, 2 (2002), pp. 299 – 323.

In addition, she writes that questionnaires that are not returned militate against the value of the questionnaires that are returned. That is particularly significant in 1834 since only 10% of questionnaires were returned, thus 90% of parish opinions were not known. The typicality of the responders is inevitably called into question. Despite these difficulties the report should be valued for its nationwide coverage. The issues of report accuracy and reliability are germane to this chapter because much evidence is gained from national reports.

Writing about work and welfare from a gendered perspective, Anna Clark outlines the contribution of historians to the examination of the breadwinner wage and female dependency, which was first described by the Webbs.¹⁵⁸ Gender Issues regarding breadwinner status are also raised by Thane and Lees. Thane writes that the Poor Law Amendment Act assumed that the two-parent family with a sole male breadwinner was the norm, with contradictions regarding the employment of women, and Lees also writes that poor men and women were treated differently by the New Poor Law with gender stereotyping of strong men and weak women.¹⁵⁹

Developing these arguments Clark identifies 1834 as the time when being a breadwinner was perceived as a responsibility. The consequence of that responsibility was that if a man could not support a family, he should not marry, and a woman who could not find a man with the ability to support a family must support herself (and her children). That concept of the male breadwinner as solely responsible was difficult to maintain due to the inherent weakness and contradictions

¹⁵⁸ A. Clark, 'The New Poor Law and the Breadwinner Wage', *Journal of Social History*, Winter 2000, pp. 261 – 281; S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law Policy* (London, 1910), passim.

¹⁵⁹ P. Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop* 5 (1976), pp. 29 – 51; L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700 – 1948* (New York 1997), pp. 196 – 217.

of the New Poor Law, the realities of family life in a low wage economy, and the diversity of a locally administered poor law system.

Between the 1850s and 1870s the concept of respectability was added to the overall concept of the breadwinner. A respectable man who was a breadwinner could be financially supported temporarily if he were ill or unemployed. Single women, widows and women not considered to be respectable were expected to support themselves. An important part of Clark's work is an examination of the rhetoric and metaphors that enhance class consciousness.

Secombe has written a largely theoretical article showing how the male breadwinner wage became the norm in Britain's industrial society.¹⁶⁰ He analyses work relations in cottage industries, in which the family worked together as a unit, and received a single payment earned by all the members of the family. Because wives, boys and girls above a certain age contributed to the earning of that wage, it was implausible for the eldest male to be considered as the sole breadwinner. Secombe links that family work structure to agriculture, in which women and children worked in addition to men.

Industrialisation provides a paradox with regard to women's work. While factories recruited women workers and at that level gave them wages to take home to their family, this threatened the patriarchal structure, whereas women's work at home did not make such a threat because the family's wages were seen as an entirety and not segmented into men's and women contributions.

In the new industrial structure women were paid as individuals and not as part of the family unit. As individuals working away from home, women were taken away from

¹⁶⁰ W. Secombe, 'Patriarchy stabilized: the construction of the male breadwinner wage norm in nineteenth-century Britain', *Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 1986), pp. 53 – 76.

the 'protection' of fathers and husbands, and also established social relations both in the workplace and in journeys to and fro. Women's competition for 'men's' jobs in the workplace and the earning of women's individual wage hardened the concept of the male breadwinner wage.

Some of Seccombe's work was predated by Ivy Pinchbeck.¹⁶¹ In 1930 Ivy Pinchbeck demonstrates that prior to industrialisation women's work was centred in the home (not necessarily housekeeping), based on family business partnerships for which the family received payments. The women's work was sometimes taken for granted. When work activities left the home and were centred away from home, women who wished or needed to earn, became wage-earners in the outside world. Pinchbeck writes that this has led people mistakenly to think the women's work only started in the Industrial Revolution. In the eighteenth century women and children were expected to earn enough for their own keep, and women's marriage opportunities were improved if they were able to add to the husband's income.

Horrell and Oxley survey the effect of a change of diet and the quality of nutrition of people between 1795 and 1834.¹⁶² There were regional differences, largely determined by the residual availability of common land and women's work. Also, they argue that by 1834 the physical heights of men were increasing, while heights of women and children were either static or in marginal decline. They suggest that 'women's food intake was constrained by maternal self-sacrifice and the role of intra-household bargaining' and was the cause of the height differential between gender and age. They cite Eden's (1795) evidence of poor diet of labourers' wives and children, allied to evidence from Shammas who wrote that in the eighteenth century

¹⁶¹ I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750 – 1850* (Virago Press, 1985).

¹⁶² S. Horrell and D. Oxley, 'Bringing home the bacon? Regional nutrition, stature, and gender in the industrial revolution', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 4 (2012), pp. 1354 – 1379.

adult men tended to receive 'substantial food' while women and children received less.¹⁶³ Both Horrell and Oxley argue that men, and boys in employment, were likely to receive more food because of their roles as breadwinners, and with a decline in girls' and women's employment opportunities their share of the household nutrition declined. Lack of employment opportunities for women and girls would also have resulted in less family purchasing power resulting in less food.

The decline of rural women's stature during the period of the Napoleonic Wars is written about by Nicholas and Oxley and they show that the height of rural-born women declined by 0.75 inches between 1800 and 1815. At the same time the height of Middlesex-born (urban) women rose by 0.7 inches over more or less the same period.¹⁶⁴

Writing about the eighteenth century Carole Shammas provides comparisons between the diets of labouring families in the north and the south.¹⁶⁵ The evidence leads her to argue that the diet of the southern families was insufficient for hard labour and growth of children, while the northern diet while higher in calories was barely adequate for its purpose. 'Rejoicing in Potatoes' was a casual remark uttered about people with not enough money to buy bread, who instead could eat potatoes.¹⁶⁶ Gurney's article uses the phrase as the starting point for a discussion of the 'Hungry Forties' and the manner in which the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League interacted with hunger issues.

¹⁶³ C. Shammas, 'The eighteenth-century English diet and economic change', *Explorations in Economic History*, 21 (1984), pp. 254 – 269; Sir F. Eden, *State of the Poor*.

¹⁶⁴ S. Nicholas and D. Oxley, 'Living standards of women in England and Wales, 1785 – 1815: New evidence from Newgate prison records', *Economic History Review*, August 1996, Vol. 49 Issue 3, p. 591 – 199.

¹⁶⁵ C. Shammas, 'The eighteenth-century English diet and economic change', *Explorations in Economic History*: July 1, 1984, 21,3.

¹⁶⁶ P. Gurney, 'Rejoicing in Potatoes: The Politics of Consumption in England during the 'Hungry Forties'', *Past and Present*, no. 203 (May 2009).

Earlier writers on the Old Poor Law sometimes characterised it as involving 'scandalous administration', very diverse systems, and 'a fearsome tangle of inconsistent and ineffective devices and regulations . . . the whole matter was very confused'.¹⁶⁷ Inconsistency and poor administration were inevitable results of a totally devolved system. The negative aspects of these characterisations were debunked by Blaug who acknowledged the variety of competence and systems, but still argued that it was 'by no means an unenlightened policy'.¹⁶⁸ In 1825 Shropshire as a county was positioned 29th in a table of 42 English counties, measured by annual gross poor law relief expenditure. Shropshire had an expenditure of £77,611.¹⁶⁹ In expenditure per capita terms, in a table of England and Wales counties Shropshire was positioned 28th of 43 in 1802 and 30th in 1831. Wales was counted as a single entity. Shropshire per capita expenditure in 1802 was 7s. 11d. and rose slightly by 1831 to 8s. 2d.¹⁷⁰ Comparing these figures with the list of parishes below would suggest that expenditure on poor relief rose from 1802 and then declined after 1821.

This comparison of poor rates in Shropshire shows that from Clun in the far south to Selattyn in the far north-west the poor rate declined, suggesting that the cost of the Old Poor Law was far from being out of control.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ S. and B. Webb, *The Old Poor Law* (Harvard, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1927) p. 154; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin Books, 1980), p. 221; D. Thompson, *England in the Nineteenth Century* (Penguin Books, 1950), pp. 68 – 70.

¹⁶⁸ M. Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Re-examined', *Journal of Economic History*, XXIV (1964), pp. 176 – 177.

¹⁶⁹ Parliamentary Papers, *Report from the Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns of the year 1835*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ V. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire, 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1979, p. 57.

¹⁷¹ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, 1832 – 1834*, Shropshire Evidence, pp. 385a – 396a.

Table 2.1. Poor Rates in Shropshire Parishes, 1821/1831

Parish	1821 Poor Rate	1831 Poor Rate
Edgmond	£943	£844
Baschurch	824	689
Ercall Magna	1,556	1,580
Worfield	1,043	731
Clun	1,317	1,154
Lydbury North	483	407
Chirbury	1,195	961
Selattyn	415	261
Shawbury	688	440
Acton Scott	168	107
Whittington	310	186
Kinlet	297	219

In 1836 William Day, the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner appointed to establish Shropshire Poor Law Unions, commented on the already low poor rate.¹⁷²

Standard of Living of Shropshire Agricultural Labourers'

Families

Overview

This part of the chapter will identify the standard of living of agricultural workers' families in Shropshire and it will use families' living standards as a proxy for the living standards of the children in those families. Much of the evidence for this section derives from Parliamentary Papers, particularly the 1843 and 1867 Reports of Commissions on the employment of women and children in agriculture, which also reported on families' standard of living.

Reports of Government Commissions provide a superficially objective source for the acquisition of data. However, as Verdon has indicated, there are difficulties for historians in using these sources.¹⁷³ One issue is the possible establishment of a government committee of inquiry in order to provide verification for a decision already taken, as with the 1832 – 1834 Commission on the Poor Laws. Such a commission will tend to ignore or downplay evidence contrary to the official opinion.

Commissions also often only take evidence from a narrow section of society, and those who chose to give evidence.

¹⁷² TNA: MH 32/14, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, 1835 – 1837, William Day to Lefevre, 5 October 1836.

¹⁷³ N. Verdon, 'The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: woman's and children's employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, LV, 2 (2002), pp. 299 – 323.

When government commissions sought opinions from Shropshire people about wage rates they asked employers rather than employees. Baldwyn Leighton always ensured that he gave evidence to any commission seeking Salopian views, whereas other landowners chose not to provide evidence. A narrow evidence base like that can distort results. Within those limitations government reports are generally used in this chapter for the acquisition of data, such as wage rates.

Agricultural labourers in many counties, including Shropshire, earned low wages, resulting in a very poor standard of living for those families. They had a diet that was unable to meet the needs of a man engaged in manual labour, a mother engaged in home-making and/or manual work, or children growing physically and engaged in manual labour. Financial contributions of the women and children of the family were essential to providing anything approaching a reasonable standard of living. Work for women was particularly scarce in Shropshire agriculture. This in turn placed more emphasis on the importance of children's work. Another opportunity to improve labourers' families' diet was the provision of an allotment. Unfortunately the number of allotments provided for agricultural labourers in Shropshire was very small. The standard of life of labourers' families was also reduced by living in poor quality cottages. A national report shows Shropshire cottages as having been very far below the national average in quality.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ *Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867)* Second Report, p. xxxiii.

Wages and the Standard of Living

The Application and Report Books of some Shropshire Poor Law Unions describe the amounts of relief given to families.¹⁷⁵ Some Application and Report Books remain from Shropshire Unions. They were completed by District Relieving Officers and identified the name of the relief applicant, his or her dependents and the action taken by the Relieving Officer or the Union authorities. An analysis of some Application and Report Books is contained in Chapter 7. In passing, Relieving Officers sometimes recorded wage levels which Shropshire agricultural labourers had earned previously to applying for relief. In the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s that averaged around 9s. per week, with rises to 10s. and 11s. in the 1860s.¹⁷⁶ These wages rates are broadly the same as described by the Journal of the Statistical Society of London in its issue of 1861.¹⁷⁷ The Society's evidence shows that when Shropshire agricultural labourers were earning 10s. a week in 1860, wage rates for similar work in Cumberland were 50% higher at 15s. Purdy shows Shropshire as having low wages when compared with all other counties except those in the west, such as Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon. Wage levels described thus only give a clue to the spending power and therefore only a clue to the standard of living of agricultural labourers and their families during this period. The labourers' living standard was affected by consumer prices, by extras that the farmer might give him, such as food, beer or fuel or a rent-free cottage, and the ability of other family

¹⁷⁵ Some Application and Report Books remain from Shropshire unions. They were completed by District Relieving Officers and identified the name of the relief applicant, his or her dependants and the action taken by the Relieving Officer or the union authorities. An analysis of some Application and Report Books is contained in Chapter 7.

¹⁷⁶ SA: PL 9/24/8/1, Ludlow Application and Report Book, pp 3 and 10; PL 1/16/7/4, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1843; PL 1/16/7/5, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1847.

¹⁷⁷ F. Purdy, 'On the Earnings of Agricultural Labourers in England and Wales, 1860', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Sept. 1861), pp. 328 – 373.

members to contribute to the family income. Nominal wages are those that are a description of how much a worker earns. Real wages are a description of what can be bought by those wages.

There is evidence from many secondary sources of the distress of agricultural labourers' families during the middle decades of the century.¹⁷⁸ None of these writers deal specifically with living standards in Shropshire but concentrate on regional or national living standards.

Reports and national enquiries such as the Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1867 – 1868, give minimal attention to Shropshire and the county's evidence is often unrepresentative since it only involves Baldwyn Leighton (Chairman of Atcham Poor Law Union) and the Chairman of Shifnal Union. There is however corroborative evidence from other counties of labourers earning similar wages to Shropshire farm workers. The 1843 Employment Report offers evidence of a doctor from Wiltshire who described labourers' wives who suffered from illnesses - 'the diseases I see arise almost all from want of proper food and clothing . . . of those who apply to me, four out of five suffer from complaints traceable to their food being insufficient in quantity, and not good enough in quality.'¹⁷⁹ 'Fresh butcher's meat is never bought, the entrails . . . being the chief luxury of those who can afford

¹⁷⁸ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660 – 1900* (Cambridge, 1985); S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History* (2005) 16, 1, 21 – 52 (Cambridge University Press, 2005); S. Horrell and D. Oxley, 'Bringing home the bacon? Regional nutrition, stature, and gender in the industrial revolution', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 4 (2012), pp. 1354 – 1379; J. Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge, 1989); A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', included in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976); B. Reay, *Rural England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); B. Reay, *The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2010); P. Sharpe, 'Explaining the Short Stature of the Poor', *Economic History Review*, Vol 65, Issue 4, pp. 1475 – 1494.

¹⁷⁹ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture 1843*, p 58.

something better than bread and potatoes'¹⁸⁰ He went on to describe the importance of children being wage-earners for the physical health of the family. 'When I reckon up those things in detail I am always more and more astonished how the labourers continue to live at all'.¹⁸¹ He was referring to families earning 8s. or 9s. a week, identical to Shropshire from the 1830s to the 1850s.

The diet of poor families was high in carbohydrate but deficient in protein and vitamins and the 1843 Report identified diseases of 'bones, glands, eyes and skin' as common to this group of people, and this was due to vitamin deficiencies. It appears that many mothers gave extra food to children at the expense of their own diet. For children this was not enough to withstand malnourishment. Also malnourishment '*in utero*' would have the same effect. 'Average height is clearly a reflection of nutritional status but it is also indicative of the effects of disease.'¹⁸² Agricultural labourer families lived in unsanitary cottages which would inevitably lead to poor food hygiene.¹⁸³ There is also evidence of a very simple diet generally composed of bread and potatoes, with agricultural families struggling to maintain children's growth, breadwinners' energy levels and to meet the needs of pregnant and lactating women. This would impact on children's stature, and health.

Horrell shows that between 1840 – 1854 'starch and farinose' purchases took up 75% of the family food budget for families working in low wage agriculture (as in Shropshire); 'Meat, fish, eggs and lard' occupied 5½% of the food budget, and milk, butter and cheese accounted for 13% of the budget. This amounted to a diet three

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁸¹ Parliamentary Papers, *Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture 1843*, p. 59.

¹⁸² P. Sharpe, 'Explaining the Short Stature of the Poor', *Economic History Review*, Vol 65, Issue 4 (2012), p. 1477.

¹⁸³ Ibid, pp. 1475 – 1494.

quarters of which was potatoes and bread.¹⁸⁴ The wages assumed for the breadwinner were slightly less than 10 shillings a week assuming employment for fifty-two weeks.

James Caird conducted a survey of English agriculture and he found that agricultural labourers' wages varied dramatically.¹⁸⁵ Labourers in South Wiltshire earned 7s. a week, while those in parts of Lancashire earned 15s. a week. In southern counties the average was calculated as 8s. 5d. and the northern average was 11s. 6d.

Caird's map showing high and low wage areas has a line demarcating the two, and it is drawn across Shropshire indicating the highest wages in the north east of the county, near the coalfield, and low wages for the rest of the county. Other evidence in this chapter seems to show wages in north Shropshire would better be described as 'less low'. Nationally the average was 9s. 6d. He thought that the opportunity of employment in nearby industries was the cause of higher agricultural wages in the north, because of competition for available labourers. Alternative employment was not available in the south. At times of agricultural difficulty in Shropshire agricultural wages in the north and east of the county tended not to decline or declined more slowly because of the proximity of the industrial areas of Madeley and Wellington.

Burnett sums up the situation thus: 'The general state of the rural labourer between 1850 and 1914 was one of chronic poverty and want, acute at the beginning of the period'.¹⁸⁶

The Government did not monitor agricultural wages' levels consistently, but did produce a report in 1868 - 1869 identifying agricultural labourer wages in England

¹⁸⁴ S. Horrell, 'Home Demand and British Industrialisation', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (September 1996), pp 569 – 570.

¹⁸⁵ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 510.

¹⁸⁶ J. Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge, 1989), p. 133.

and Wales. That showed Shropshire labourers from Atcham and Shifnal earned 11s. a week. Atcham and Shifnal were the only two Shropshire Unions to submit evidence. Shifnal Union also recorded that labourers earned an extra 4s. a week for 'task work' at harvest time with cottage and yard rent free with two quarts of beer per day. Atcham records no extra payments, and this resonates with Shifnal farmers needing to pay more because of proximity to the Shropshire Coalfield and local industry.¹⁸⁷ In the 1868 – 1869 Report the lowest wages of 10s. a week were found in Herefordshire and the highest of 16s. a week were earned in Westmoreland, Durham, West Riding of Yorkshire and Huntingdonshire. With the exception of Huntingdonshire this shows a north-south divide in agricultural wages, but Huntingdonshire's evidence is taken from only one source. The report did not necessarily use a range of sources or systematically describe extra benefits such as beer, a garden and a cottage so some caution needs to be exercised over the statistics but 11s. a week in 1869 fits in well with other evidence of Shropshire as a low wage county. The other areas with wages of 11s. were Southampton (a proxy for Hampshire), Bedfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cornwall and Somerset.

Caird lamented the power of large landowners who sometimes employed all the labourers in a parish because they used their economic power as a monopoly employer to keep down wages.¹⁸⁸ Caird also identified 'a want of vigour and activity' as might be expected from the meagre diet, resulting from such low wages. Some labourers were paid partly in kind (the truck system) which could result in being paid

¹⁸⁷ Parliamentary Papers, 1868 - 69 (3711) *Agricultural labourers' earnings. Return of the average rate of weekly earnings of agricultural labourers in the unions of England and Wales, Quarter ended Michaelmas 1869*, pp. 2 – 20.

¹⁸⁸ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 518.

in substandard foodstuffs, such as butter and cheese unfit for market.¹⁸⁹ Until 1857 the punishment for poaching was transportation, so that was a very dangerous way of acquiring meat.¹⁹⁰ In 1863 there was a report commissioned by the Medical Officer of the Privy Council. The resulting enquiries and the report were the responsibility of Dr. Edward Smith, Medical Officer of the Poor Law Board. In the Appendix to the 1863 Report he invented the concept of the minimum subsistence level below which adults could not live a civilised life. This subsistence level was based on the nutritional value of food.¹⁹¹

The Report showed that the English labourer's diet was above the minimum level, with those in the north of the country better fed than in the south. The report also showed that most food went to the breadwinner with less for a wife and children, and standards of nutrition dropped in families where children were too young to work, the wife could find no employment and where home rents were high, with no space for growing food. It showed that bread was the main food followed by potatoes.

Burnett has calculated a modern scientific analysis of Edward Smith's 'minimum subsistence diet' and writes that it underestimated the needs of an agricultural labourer by 1,000 kilocalories a day, which would have resulted in very low energy levels at work. If the extra 1,000 calories were given to the male breadwinner then the rest of the family would have had proportionately worse nutrition. In addition the lack of protein in a predominantly potato and bread diet would have been inadequate for pregnant and lactating women and growing children.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), *Second Report, Stanhope's Report*, p.29; John Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989), p. 138.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 139.

¹⁹¹ *Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council* (1863) Appendix No. 6.

¹⁹² J. Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 143.

Within the 1863 Medical Officers Report Shropshire was included in the list of counties in which some families could not afford to buy butcher's meat. The average amount of butcher's meat or bacon eaten by an adult Shropshire agricultural labourer was 5½ oz. per week. That was the lowest amount in the thirty-nine counties examined. At the other end of the scale 29½ oz. was eaten by adult labourers in Durham. There were examples in Shropshire of sheep's head and pluck bought by those unable to buy butcher's meat. This was boiled to make a broth which was given to children during the week and the melted fat was used as dripping.¹⁹³ The overall evidence of the Report shows that labourers' families were only above the 'minimum subsistence level' if the labourer's wife had paid employment, the children were old enough to work, and their cottage rent was low, and the cottage itself included a substantial garden or allotment.

In the south west of the county, hours were not strictly limited, and extra work did not always result in extra pay. Some married men were boarders in the farmhouse because they lived a long way off, and this led to working extra hours for no pay. Also the labourers were charged for their boarding so less money went to the family.¹⁹⁴ The 1867 Employment Report described mop or hiring fairs that existed in South Shropshire where labourers entered into agreement with employers without a clear understanding of duties and wages.¹⁹⁵ This is confirmed by the evidence of Lord Powys' bailiff who said that wage agreements at fairs were very vague and wages often varied with the price of corn. He said it was common for labourers living

¹⁹³ Parliamentary Papers, *Public Health, Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, with appendix, 1863*, p. 246.

¹⁹⁴ Parliamentary Papers, *Reports of the Commissioners on Children's, Young Persons and Women's Employment in Agriculture, 1867 - 1870*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 29.

in estate cottages to do extra work for no pay.¹⁹⁶ In the 1850s the most common category of inmate of the Shrewsbury Asylum was those deranged by the 'ceaseless labour and anxieties of the lowest rank of labouring independence'.¹⁹⁷

Friendly Societies often failed agricultural labourers. Assistant Poor Law Commissioner Stanhope identified many cases of labourers paying into a club which failed. Sometimes younger members dissolved the club before older members could benefit. Sometimes clubs were mismanaged, or promised more than could be delivered, or had an untrustworthy treasurer. He acknowledged that a low earning labourer could not afford contributions to a reliable club. Shropshire had had at least one such large solvent club, but its membership generally consisted of workers better paid than agricultural labourers.¹⁹⁸ Stanhope was told that very few men in Clun belonged to a Benefit Club, because the People's Society (a benefit club) had collapsed six or seven years before, due to bad management.¹⁹⁹

There was a report from the Registrar of Friendly Societies presented to Parliament in 1877. The section on Shropshire contains some information about 308 friendly societies. Of the 308 societies listed, only 167 of them have members and assets. It seems reasonable to assume that the others were defunct. The fact that about 45% of societies were defunct indicates that societies often had a short life. Many of the societies were located in large towns, which would indicate a membership composed of urban dwellers. There were a few in villages such as Wistanstow, Westbury and Aston-on-Clun, which presumably had a rural membership and there were societies named 'Speed the Plough' and 'Farmers' Glory' which suggest an

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 77.

¹⁹⁷ *Victoria County History, Shropshire*, Vol III, pp. 161, 169, 171-2.

¹⁹⁸ Parliamentary Papers, *Reports of the Commissioners on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture, 1867 - 1870*, p.30.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 76.

agricultural membership. A few societies have given details of their payments and they indicated payments of between 1s. 6d. a week to 5s. a week in retirement. Only five societies indicated that they paid sick pay.²⁰⁰

Analysing wage statistics for Shropshire agricultural labourers is fraught with difficulty for the historian since only the poor law unions of Shifnal and Atcham contribute to national surveys. The report of 1861 shows male labourers' weekly wage at 10s. in Shifnal, with waggoners and shepherds earning 11s., women earning 4s. and children under 16 years old earning 5s. with no additional task work in the quarter ending Lady-day. For Atcham there are only wage rates for men listed with the additional comment "The severity of the winter cut off nearly all of the ordinary sources of labour for women and children". The evidence shows that agricultural workers' families fared better in Shifnal which is on the Shropshire coalfield compared with purely agricultural Atcham.²⁰¹

Again in 1868 – 1869 labourers' families incomes were better in Shifnal than in Atcham, particularly if one adds the wages of women and children. The 1868 – 1869 returns are for the quarter ending Michaelmas, which contains the summer months of 1869, and yet surprisingly Atcham records no earnings for women and children. Women's and children's work is only mentioned in Baldwin Leighton's (Chairman of Atcham Poor Law Union), copious additional notes in the context of tilling the labourers' own potato ground. Leighton also emphasises that 40% of labourers on his estate at Alberbury have enough land to keep a cow. He also emphasises that

²⁰⁰ Parliamentary Papers, 1877 (429) *Friendly societies, industrial and provident societies, and trade unions. Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, for the year ending 31st December 1876.*

²⁰¹ Parliamentary Papers, 1861 *Agricultural labourers' earnings. Further return of the average rate of weekly earnings of agricultural labourers in the unions of England and Wales*, pp. 8, 22, 37.

contrary to popular belief, many labourers on his estate do manage to save money.²⁰²

The wage position is unchanged in 1871 but in the 1872 – 1873 reports Shifnal wage rates climb to 15s. for an agricultural labourer, 5s. for women and 8s. for children under 16. Atcham wage rates during the same period were 12s. to 15s. for men, 6s. to 7s. for women and 2s. to 5s. for children.²⁰³

These show that Shifnal's agricultural families are less poor than Atcham's because of the proximity of alternative work in the coalfield and associated industries, and the prevalence of women's and children's work.

With agricultural labourers earning subsistence wages once they married and had children, the evidence from this chapter is that the employment and subsequent wages of wives and children was crucial to raising the family's standard of living. When children were young and below working age not only did they not earn themselves but made it difficult for the wife/mother to earn money and were another mouth to feed. If wages from women and children were crucial then the agricultural areas of Shropshire provided little help. The section of the 1834 Poor Law Report which concerned women's work in Shropshire contains phrases such as 'women are seldom employed', 'turnip dressing in winter and weeding and haymaking in the summer', 'women not much employed'. Even when they were employed at stone picking or topping turnips their earnings were in the region of 6d to 8d a day. A J. P. from Whittington recorded, 'In winter I can have labourers for any wage I think proper to give'. He was referring to male labourers so that left little opportunity for

²⁰² Parliamentary Papers, 1868 – 1869 (371) *Agricultural labourers' earnings. Return of the average rate of weekly earnings of agricultural labourers in the unions of England and Wales*, p. 10.

²⁰³ Parliamentary Papers, 1871 (181) *Agricultural labourers' earnings. Return of the average rate of weekly earnings of agricultural labourers in the unions of England and Wales*, p. 24; 1873 (358) *Agricultural labourers' earnings. Return of the average rate of weekly earnings of agricultural labourers in the unions of England and Wales*, pp. 9 - 10.

women.²⁰⁴ In the 1867 Report evidence from the Shropshire Chamber of Agriculture stated that the employment of women was uncommon. This is confirmed by evidence to the Report from villages and towns in the county. In Hodnet 'women rarely work in the fields at all', and in Middle (Myddle) women were only employed at harvest time as they were at Lydbury North, but there they received no money, only a right to glean.²⁰⁵

In 1867 a J.P. from Sellatyn confirmed this: 'The market price of labour is at certain seasons very low; labourers may be had for almost anything we please to give, the supply so far exceeds the demand at particular times. . . . Women and children are not now so much employed as formerly because labouring men are so plentiful and their labour so cheap'.²⁰⁶

A problem with identifying women's work, particularly in low wage agriculture is 'chronic underreporting of occupations caused by a woman's wide variety of possible money earning activities'.²⁰⁷ There must be a doubt as to whether the male witnesses who provided evidence to various reports were able to recognise women's work, either through poor observation or for ideological reasons.²⁰⁸

Madeley pit managers employed women on surface work at the pit head. In Ercall Magna strong women could earn 8d. a day weeding but weaker women earned less.

²⁰⁴ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834*, p. 396A.

²⁰⁵ Parliamentary Papers, *Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture (1867)*, *Second report of the commissioners*, with appendix part I, pp. 74 – 84.

²⁰⁶ Parliamentary Papers, *Reports of the Commissioners on Children's, Young Persons and Women's Employment in Agriculture, 1867 - 1870*, p. 13, p. 393A.

²⁰⁷ Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family 1790 – 1865', *Economic History Review* XLVIII (1995), pp 97 – 98.

²⁰⁸ N. Verdon, 'The Rural Labour Market in the Early Nineteenth Century: Women's and Children's Employment, Family Income and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review* LV, 2 (2002), p. 303.

In Wem there was 'no employment for women and children in summer or winter'.²⁰⁹

If agricultural labourers did not earn enough (or at best only just enough) to feed their family, and wives and mothers found paid work difficult to obtain, this placed pressure on children to earn money.

This lack of employment opportunities for women in Shropshire agriculture is confirmed by Horrell and Humphries who confirm that in low wage agricultural areas, such as Shropshire, and particularly South Shropshire, children's earnings made a greater contribution to the family income than did the wife's/mother's earnings.²¹⁰ In Clun young children earned money at 'bird-minding' and 'pig-minding'. Also in South Shropshire children stayed home from school to collect acorns for pigs. In contrast, in West Felton the Reverend Haslehurst said that infant education was very important to agricultural labourer's children because their school life was so short, because of the need to contribute to the family income. The Vicar of Lydbury North said that in his village, boys worked from seven or eight years old at 4d. a day and continued until ten or eleven years old when they became regular employees.²¹¹ Another useful addition to the family income was gleaning. It is remarkable that in a period (1834 – 1870) of economic expansion across the county and during a period of agricultural development called variously 'The Golden Age of Farming' and the 'Era of High Farming' that gleaning should still be regarded as economically significant, both in the Poor Law Commission Report (1834) and much later in the Report on Women and Children in Work in 1867.

²⁰⁹ Parliamentary Papers, *Reports of the Commissioners on Children's, Young Persons and Women's Employment in Agriculture, 1867 - 1870*, p. 13, pp 392A and 395A.

²¹⁰ S. Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family 1790 – 1865', *Economic History Review* XLVI (1995), p. 102.

²¹¹ Parliamentary Papers (4202–1), *Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867)*, Second Report, Appendix 1, p. 75.

In returns to the Poor Law Commission of 1834 about a quarter of Shropshire parishes mentioned gleaning. That activity, not included in employment statistics, appears to have been valuable to poor families, particularly those headed by widows or unmarried mothers. It was paradoxically particularly valuable at times of poor harvests, because the price of flour and therefore bread increased, but not only was gleaning free - it was often more plentiful if the crop had been storm damaged and harder to harvest. There was a doubling of wheat acreage between 1750 and 1840, particularly affecting the prospects for gleaning. Even low grade technological developments such as the change from sickle to scythe left more for gleaners.²¹²

In the south-west of the county women worked a little on farms, on condition of being allowed to glean. This happened at Bishop's Castle.²¹³ Ashby and King, when tabulating average earnings, identified that a small but significant proportion of total family wages were received through gleaning.²¹⁴

Allotments

Burchardt has defined the first period of the allotment movement as occurring between about 1793 – 1830, which was a time of 'severe pressure on living standards'.²¹⁵ From 1793 to 1815 that pressure was partly alleviated by the demand for labour during the war and high prices for agricultural products. However, Snell records that in agriculture real male and female wages fell from 1780 to at least

²¹² P. King, 'Customary Rights and People's Earnings. The importance of gleaning to the Rural Labouring Poor 1750 – 1850', *Economic History Review* 3 (191), p. 461 – 476.

²¹³ J. Ashby and B. King, 'Statistics of Some Midland Villages', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 9, (M) 1893, pp. 13 and 77.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

²¹⁵ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (The Boydell Press, 2011), p. 9.

1834.²¹⁶ Armstrong writes that 14 of the 22 grain harvests were deficient.²¹⁷ Wells described these years as ‘famine’ and that mortality levels rose during 1794 – 1795 and 1799 – 1800 due to bad harvests.²¹⁸ These conditions led to proposals to give the poor some land to work. One proposal involved the use of common land and uncultivated non-common land. The idea of pastoral allotments failed to gain ground because of logistic reasons and the idea of allotments as arable land became the norm.²¹⁹

Allotment provision expanded after 1830 and Burchardt argues that it was a response to the Swing Riots.²²⁰ However, there was opposition to allotments and it came from two sources. Firstly, there was some rare opposition from landowners who were concerned by sub-division of holdings, the blurring of class distinctions and by the fear of an increase in the pauper population.²²¹

More pragmatic opposition came from farmers. The allocation of land for allotments had to come from somewhere, and farmers often refused to allocate the land in the face of opposition from ‘rector, curate and local gentry’.²²² Farmers’ concerns were that allotments were often expected to be let at a cheaper rent than farms, and that working on an allotment diminished energy levels. This would be particularly true if the real wages of the labourer failed to provide adequate nutrition. The farmers’ other concerns were that by giving labourers an alternative source of income it made

²¹⁶ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp.23 – 66, 40 – 99.

²¹⁷ A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers* (Batsford, 1988), p. 56).

²¹⁸ R. Wells, *Wretched Faces* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2011), pp.55 – 70).

²¹⁹ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (The Boydell Press, 2011), Chapter 1.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 70

²²¹ J. Burchardt, ‘Rural Social Relations 1830 – 1850. Opposition to allotments for labourers’, *Agricultural History Review*, 1997.

²²² J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (The Royal Historical Society, 2011), p. 169.

them less reliant on their role as farm labourers and were more likely to absent themselves from their principal occupation at times.²²³

There was concern among farming interests that labourers given land could become small farmers with many ensuing social and economic problems for the original farmers. This concern resulted in compromise in which the landless labourers were given *temporary* access by farmers to uncultivated and poor land to grow potatoes, and demarcated as 'potato grounds'.²²⁴

Land generally used for 'potato grounds' was often small and was placed on commons, road verges and corners of fields. While potato grounds were small, verges and field corners were bigger in the nineteenth century than now.²²⁵ In contrast to this, allotments were let by large landowners, and the arrangement had a quasi-permanent nature, were generally cheaper to rent than potato grounds, and because of their semi-permanence the labourer was able to build up fertility over years. Potato ground was let by farmers as a commercial proposition, while allotments were let to benefit labourers' families and to improve their moral character.²²⁶

In Shropshire, provision of allotments was sparse and occurred only when large landowners provided appropriate land. This provision was given an impetus by Lord Kenyon, owner of substantial estates to the west of Shropshire and on the Shropshire-Cheshire Plain. He subscribed to the Labourers' Friend Society, which advocated letting land to labourers and persuaded others to do the same. Amongst

²²³ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850 – 1851* (Longman, 1852), p. 29; J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (Royal Historical Society, 2011), Chapter 3.

²²⁴ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (Royal Historical Society, 2011), chapter 1, p. 13.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 14.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* ch. 1.

Kenyon's contacts was Sir Rowland Hill, owner of the Hawkestone Estate, who consequently introduced allotments and smallholdings.²²⁷

Hill was also an improver of labourers' cottages. Another improver of cottages and letting of allotments was Baldwin Leighton, who owned an estate at Loton and Alberbury, west of Shrewsbury. He encouraged labourers to save, because he let out cottages with allotments or smallholdings attached but only to men who could produce a savings book.²²⁸

The opportunity to save money must have been beyond the financial ability of most agricultural workers and there was still opposition of small farmers to allotments. Working on the allotments let to labourers only occupied the time equivalent of one month's work spread over the year, but farmers from Alberbury complained of labourers' unreliability. Also on the Loton Estate, Samuel Plimley, a farmer and grazier near to bankruptcy complained that labourers' allotments were let at a very cheap rent in contrast to farm rents.²²⁹

Despite the large landowners in the north of the county, the provision of allotments was poor in comparison to other counties. In 1867 a report was commissioned into the employment of children, young persons and women in agriculture. The Assistant Commissioner responsible for reporting on employment and related issues in Shropshire was the Honourable Edward Stanhope. The 1867 Report confirms that allotment provision was inadequate and Stanhope was told that it was because labourers had gardens and potato ground. He commented that the gardens are 'of

²²⁷ Parliamentary Papers, *Report from the Select Committee on Agriculture*; with the minutes of evidence taken before them, and an appendix and index, 1833 (612) pp. 283 – 285.

²²⁸ *Victoria County History, Shropshire*, Volume IV, 1750 – 1875. Baldwin Leighton was Chairman of the Atcham Poor Law Union.

²²⁹ *Second Report of Employment of Children and Women in Agriculture, 1867*, Appendix Part II, pp. 79 – 80.

very inadequate size' and that potato ground commanded a high rent 'which makes it in fact hardly any boon at all'. He remarked on the good quality allotments and smallholdings let by Baldwin Leighton.²³⁰ The next census of allotment provision came in 1873 in the shape of the Agricultural Returns. They showed that Shropshire had 1,002 allotments, which was one allotment for every 14½ labourers. This latter figure places Shropshire near the bottom of the counties league table for allotments per labourer. Only Cheshire, Lancashire and Westmoreland had a worse ratio of plot to labourer. These counties had higher agricultural wage rates than Shropshire. The leading county was Leicestershire with 17,168 allotments, which indicated 1 allotment per 0.7 labourers, and therefore many people had more than one, or they were let to people other than labourers.²³¹

Cottages

Perhaps the most revealing and succinct comment about agricultural labourers' cottages in Shropshire is contained in a sentence of Assistant Commissioner Stanhope in 1867, when writing about cottages in Dorset. 'The cottages of this county (Dorset) are more ruinous and contain worse accommodation than those in any county I have visited, except Shropshire'.²³²

In the same report he described Shropshire cottages as 'infamous', 'tumbledown and ruinous', 'not water-tight', 'very deficient in bedroom accommodation and indecent

²³⁰ Ibid, p. xxxiv, and p. 13. Assistant Commissioner Stanhope was the author of part of the Report.

²³¹ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793 – 1873* (The Boydell Press), 2011, pp. 182 – 183.

²³² *Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867)* Second Report, p. xxxiii.

sanitary arrangements'.²³³ In the south-west of the county, traditionally a low wage area, he described the conditions of the 'peasantry' as 'most deplorably low'.²³⁴ He described cottages across the county as uniformly bad and cited two large landowners who had demolished run-down cottages instead of refurbishing or replacing them. This resulted in agricultural workers living close-packed in open villages and therefore having large distances to walk to work. Many Shropshire cottages were very small with only one bedroom. In addition to this criticism of housing quality he also reported that they were not cheap to rent.²³⁵ As with many aspects of Shropshire life in the middle nineteenth century, Baldwin Leighton of the Loton Estate operated against the trend. He built good sized cottages on his estate, often with allotments.²³⁶

The Coming of the New Poor Law to Shropshire

After the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act, the Commission turned its attention to founding Unions in the south of England. From 1837 to 1839 the Commission struggled to found Unions in the north of England. Between the campaigns in the south and the north the Commission turned its attention to Wales and other English counties including Shropshire.

The Commission appointed William Day as the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for Shropshire and Wales and he established his headquarters in Shrewsbury, and arrived there in mid-January 1836. His central task was to organise and amalgamate

²³³ Ibid, p. xxxiv.

²³⁴ Ibid, p. xxi.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. xiii.

²³⁶ Plans of his cottages can be found in *Victoria County History* Volume IV, 1750 – 1875. Baldwin Leighton was a complex man who matched his commitment to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act with county-wide philanthropy and practical support for his tenants.

parishes into Poor Law Unions. Day expected little difficulty in Shropshire. He wrote soon after his appointment that Shropshire was a 'most uninteresting Poor Law County – sterile as the hills of these parts themselves'.²³⁷

Day wrote that a reformer like himself would gain little credit for reducing the poor rates because they were already low. The unemployed agricultural workers tended to find work in the coal and iron districts.²³⁸ In general, south of Shrewsbury and Atcham, the Old Poor Law was administered by parishes, but in the north of the county there were Local Act Incorporations and these Incorporations had the right to refuse to dissolve themselves. Incorporations which refused to dissolve had the potential to disrupt the plans of Assistant Commissioners because the presence of incorporated parishes affected the poor law geography of the rest of the county. The Government did not legislate for the dissolution of the Incorporations because they feared that such bodies might use their political connections to slow down the passing of the 1834 Bill. Day decided to leave the Shrewsbury Incorporation until he had organised the rest of the county. The Shrewsbury parishes, though, recognised the prescriptive nature of his plans and were opposed to dissolution.²³⁹

Day intended to construct Unions around rural market towns, and that proved practical in the southern part of the county and in the coalfields.²⁴⁰ Where there were no incorporations Ludlow, Clun, Cleobury Mortimer, Bridgnorth and Church Stretton Unions were quickly formed. The bulk of the industrial parishes were formed into Wellington (north part of the coalfield) and Madeley (south part of the coalfield),

²³⁷ National Library of Wales, 3146F, William Day to Chadwick, 3 May 1836.

²³⁸ TNA: MH 32/14, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, Shropshire Unions 1835 – 1837, William Day to Lefevre, 5 October 1836.

²³⁹ TNA: MH 12/10053, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Shropshire Unions 1834 – 1846, William Day to the Poor Law Commission, 7 February 1836.

²⁴⁰ V. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire, 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania (1979), p 148.

though Madeley included rural parishes towards Much Wenlock. The smaller eastern region of the coalfield was divided between Newport and Shifnal, both of which included rural parishes in the east of the county. Market Drayton was also the central town of the Drayton Union.

Even though some of these Unions contained Staffordshire parishes, and some Shropshire parishes were included in out-of-county unions, they were formed without difficulty. What characterised these parishes was that they were not included in local Incorporations. The local incorporations, Shrewsbury, Atcham, Oswestry, Ellesmere and Whitchurch, were to become a problem for Day. He wrote that their workhouses were 'each big enough to hold an army' and he felt that it would be wrong to establish Unions without the use of such workhouses, meaning that he wanted the Incorporations to become Unions.²⁴¹

Atcham Union dissolved itself, and Day's plan was to use the Union to geographically surround Shrewsbury, making it likely that Shrewsbury and Atcham would become one Union at a later stage.²⁴² Baldwin Leighton who was described by Day as 'the great man about Poor Laws in this neighbourhood' worked with Day to found a large Atcham Union of 45 parishes with a population of 17,910. Ellesmere Incorporation dissolved itself, after Day negotiated with Lord Kenyon, a local major landowner. Oswestry refused to dissolve and the Directors told Day that if he entered their meeting room they would walk out.²⁴³ Day wrote that the Oswestry Directors were in

²⁴¹ The National Library of Wales, 3145F Day to Lefevre 7 February 1836.

²⁴² The Atcham Incorporation directors were told by Day that new legislation was coming to dissolve Incorporations. As a result of which the directors agreed to dissolve. When they discovered that no such legislation was planned they called another meeting but the majority of the directors were still in favour of becoming a Union.

²⁴³ R. A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, Vol. X, 1963 – 1964, pp. 163 – 196.

disagreement on many issues but they were united against him.²⁴⁴ Whitchurch was a single parish Incorporation which initially refused to dissolve, but did so in 1854.

There were cogent reasons why some Incorporations were reluctant to dissolve themselves. Incorporations which had invested heavily in a large, expensive workhouse were reluctant for newcomers to take advantage of that without having to pay for the construction of the building. Both Shrewsbury and Montgomery/Pool had decentralised powers to the parishes on key matters involving the Incorporations' affairs, and those parishes were reluctant to lose their recently won autonomy. The *Salopian Journal*, writing of Shrewsbury parishes, stated that unionisation was 'opposed to the results of experience'.²⁴⁵ It is also reasonable to consider that Day's character and personality may have affected his ability to persuade the Incorporations to dissolve. Day's correspondence (which he presumably assumed to be confidential) shows him to be patronising, and indicated to Shropshire that the county wasn't worthy of his time. Day took a very patrician view of what he probably perceived as plebeian Salopians. He criticised the Ludlow Union because Guardians had political differences with each other and he said that Clun Union was badly run because of 'sheer stupidity'. In addition he wrote that when the Clun Guardians were hostile to him it was because they were ignorant and 'far too Boeotian to entertain principles'.²⁴⁶

Even with the Atcham and Bridgnorth Unions he could not resist criticism. The Chairmen of both Unions, Sir Baldwin Leighton (Atcham) and Wolryche Whitmore

²⁴⁴ TNA: MH 32/14, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, Wellington Union 1841 – 1842, William Day to Lefevre, 13 December 1836.

²⁴⁵ *The Salopian Journal*, 30 March 1836.

²⁴⁶ R. A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, Vol. X, 1963 – 1964, p. 174. (The Boeotians were considered to be stupid by the culturally superior Athenians.)

(Bridgnorth) both operated in the spirit of the Poor Law Amendment Act. Day criticised them both for being too principled and committed.²⁴⁷

After Shropshire he transferred his energies to forming Welsh Unions, and the attitudes of a colonial administrator were to serve him badly. In his letters to the Poor Law Commission he complained of 'Ancient Britons, Welsh barbarism, Welsh dirtiness, Welsh poverty, Welsh lethargy, Welsh non-conformity'.²⁴⁸ While he may not have spoken to Welsh poor law administrators in that tone it is hard to imagine that that level of contempt was not obvious to people.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 175.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 176.

Chapter 3

The Domestic Life of Shropshire Workhouse Children

Poor Law Guardians had the opportunity to put their particular Union stamp on some aspects of a pauper child's life, most noticeably in generosity of out-relief, health, sympathetic apprenticeships and education. Guardians who understood and cared about the needs of pauper children were more likely to meet those needs than Guardians who did not understand or chose not to. Guardians had a conflict of interest, since they were elected by ratepayers who may have had reducing their rates bill as their highest priority. In the children's general experience of life in the workhouse (apart from health, education and apprenticeship) the scope for Guardians to attend to children's well-being was limited. Firstly, the workhouse envisaged by the Poor Law Amendment Act was not designed with the needs of children in mind; secondly, an abundance of national regulation on workhouse conduct and administration held some advantages for paupers, but the safety net of regulations could easily become the non-aspirational norm. Regulations provide a safety net but they can also impose a ceiling.

Some historians have viewed the workhouse system through the prism of social order, and the restoration of a malleable, disciplined workforce. Donajgrodzki compares the views and careers of Hugh Tremeneere (a Poor Law Assistant Commissioner and Mines Inspector) and Edwin Chadwick (Secretary to the Poor Law Commission and enthusiast for Sanitary Reform) and finds that both believed in social order as the result of a common morality, promulgated and developed by the

institutions of society.²⁴⁹ The poor, who lacked the perceived common morality of the more advantaged population, were susceptible to political agitators and therefore some system of social control had to be adopted to prevent the poor from straying from the path of common morality. Tremenheere saw increased contact between classes as the solution whereas Chadwick envisaged institutional control, in the form of the Workhouse.²⁵⁰ That institution, when properly managed, while protecting the moral population from the immoral poor, enabled some of the poor to acquire socially acceptable attitudes which in turn enabled them to shed their pauperism. In Chadwick's view not only would the inmate accept the self-regulation of the establishment (of the institution) but in Workhouse terms will accept the self-regulation of society and its social order. The intention of the workhouse was to rescue people from life-long pauperism, both by forcing the able-bodied to re-enter the workforce at any wage level, and by operating a regime within the house that introduced new habits and ways of thinking of inmates. This intention became confused by the conflicting demands of harshness and discipline, on the one hand, and on the other hand by the need to care for categories of inmates who were in the workhouse through no fault of their own. The ethos of the Poor Law Amendment Act was centred around unrelenting discipline for the able-bodied workhouse inmates, thus making that institution the refuge of last resort. This also had the effect of forcing those who wouldn't accept workhouse discipline to enter the workforce in a very poor wage-bargaining position.

²⁴⁹ A. Donajrodzki, (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Croom Helm, 1977).

²⁵⁰ A. Donajrodzki, 'Social Police and the bureaucratic elite: a vision of order in the age of reform', included in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Croom Helm, 1977).

Discussing suggestions of New Poor Law cruelty Henriques attempts to strike a balance between two viewpoints on the New Poor Law.²⁵¹ One viewpoint is that it was excessively cruel and deliberately so, and another which argues the other case, suggesting that isolated scandals and cruelties were the exception. The latter case was put by David Roberts in an earlier article.²⁵² Henriques argues that Roberts was correct to criticise the exaggeration of cruelty and scandalous behaviour. She argues that even if the New Poor Law was not designed to be cruel, it was certainly not generous, and the workhouse regime was self-defeating in many ways. She also accuses the Commissioners of engaging in a self-deluding Orwellian Newspeak such as 'independence' really meaning 'fear of parish relief', and concludes by arguing that despite the mitigating efforts of some Guardians and Union officers, the New Poor Law was class legislation based on class interest.

The history of the workhouse and Poor Law Unions is generally viewed from either an administrative national viewpoint or a local (though often still administrative) viewpoint which provides community context and proximity to events and people. Driver approaches the subject from a historical/geographical perspective, and so his analysis consists of examination of boundaries, places, spatial strategies, separations and landscapes.²⁵³ He identifies the early disagreements about the single mixed workhouse *vis-a-vis* the use of smaller existing poorhouses, and how the concept of a large, forbidding-style house came to be the preferred solution. Thus the design of the building created a deterrent and disciplining background to relations between paupers and the Poor Law authorities. To an onlooker there seemed little difference

²⁵¹ U. Henriques, 'How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?', *Journal of Economic History* xxiii (1964), pp. 229 – 245.

²⁵² David Roberts, 'How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?', *Historical Journal* 6, March 1963, pp. 97 – 107.

²⁵³ F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

between the external appearance of a workhouse and a prison. The deterrence and discipline of the workhouse and its physical similarity to prison in appearance echoes the themes articulated by Foucault. He writes about the 18th century institutionalising of the mad and those whom the state felt the need to control. They were controlled within the institution by discipline and regulation.²⁵⁴ In contrast, Crowther analyses the difference between Foucault's institutions with inmates compelled to enter, with workhouses designed to deter the population from entering them, except in extremis.²⁵⁵

Within the workhouse, the design was based on spatial segregation into at least seven separate categories of pauper. Large workhouses built after 1834 tended to separate the pauper from the rest of the community and this geographical separation was a metaphor for the emotional estrangement between the poor and their previous community. Continuing the themes of social order and historical geography Digby pre-dates Driver's geographical approach by describing Norfolk workhouses as 'substantial, even impressive' but tellingly writes about their 'isolated sites' at best on the edge of market towns.²⁵⁶

In Shropshire pre-1834 smaller scale workhouses were generally sited within communities which emphasised a positive relationship between the poor and the rest of the community. (Church Stretton and Ludlow are good examples.) Post-1834 large Shropshire workhouses tended to be located outside of towns (again Church Stretton and Ludlow are good examples of this change) which was partly a function of the required size of plots of land but also a function of the growing lack of empathetic connection between the very poor and the rest of the community. The large

²⁵⁴ M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, (Vintage, 2006), passim.

²⁵⁵ M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, 1983), pp. 65 – 67.

²⁵⁶ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

workhouses, both pre and post 1834, provided opportunities to use interior space to meet the needs of their inmates. How far Shropshire workhouses used these spaces well will be an important issue for this chapter.

The nature of workhouse life for its inmates was not an uncomplicated matter.

Thoughtful writers such as Crowther recognise the varied and complex experiences to which inmates were subjected.²⁵⁷ One strategy that she uses to achieve this recognition is to treat the workhouse as an entity separate from but inextricably part of the New Poor Law system. Clearly workhouses were an integral part of a wider strategy for the management of the poor but Crowther only seeks to contextualise it in her first chapter. This lack of context has been criticised but her focus on the workhouse as a separate institution bears fruit for the reader. That focus enables her to challenge the stereotypical writing of contemporary novelists, and historians such as Longmate, and to describe the complex nature of workhouse life for the different categories of inmates. This complex nature stems from the competing demands placed on Poor Law Unions and workhouses in being required to deter some, while providing services for others to enable them to have a reasonable existence within the institution. For most inmates their presence there indicated having given up the fight for independence, or in the case of children, others having surrendered on their behalf. Crowther, however, shows that workhouse life was different for different types of inmate and could be a partially useful experience for many. She avoids the stark dichotomy of perceiving the workhouse as merely an agent of capitalism designed to create a passive workforce and a perception of the institution as struggling to manage huge social problems by acknowledging both and seeing the house as an example of institutional care.

²⁵⁷ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, London, 1983).

Concentrating on local sources, particularly Guardians' Minute books, Crompton uses central authorities' documents sparingly, and then only to offer background and structure to local decisions.²⁵⁸ Concentrating on the experience of children in the county of Worcestershire workhouses sets this work apart from others which either investigate the New Poor Law as it affected all paupers and from others which focus on purely urban poverty. Its localism also serves as a contrast with national studies relating to children. Concentrating on local sources does create difficulties in that Union minutes were written by Guardians' Clerks, working closely with Guardians' Chairmen, who made decisions as to what and what not to include in Minutes. This is evident in Shropshire Unions' minutes, when comparing Ludlow with a diffident personality as Chairman having an open approach to Union Minutes and Atcham where Baldwyn Leighton dominated the union. The historian's task is to manage this problem as well as it can be done. On the other hand, Poor Law Commission or Board documents, once they move away from statistics are subject to orthodoxies and preconceived attitudes, and in Shropshire's case, to the predispositions of the locals who gave evidence to national enquiries. In the Shropshire evidence to Commission or Board documents, ubiquitously prominent among the contributors is Baldwyn Leighton who was Chairman of Atcham Poor Law Union, an advocate of in-maintenance relief and a strong opponent of out-relief.²⁵⁹

Worcestershire, with its combination of rural and urban unions has similarities with Shropshire, and Crompton describes the rural-urban contrasts of treatment of the poor as insignificant, except in the field of education provision. Here, he describes rural Guardians as resistant to the education of pauper children because it breached

²⁵⁸ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997), pp. vii – viii.

²⁵⁹ F. Childe (ed.), *Extracts from Letters and Speeches, etc. of Sir Baldwin Leighton, Bt.* Privately printed (Shrewsbury, 1875).

the principle of less eligibility and because they perceived it to be of little use to the children unless it consisted of spade husbandry. Notions of less eligibility for children declined during the 1840s.²⁶⁰ Indeed the concept of an institution in which all categories of pauper were treated the same disappeared early in the life of the New Poor Law, in the face of social justice and experience. Crompton perceives 1847 as a watershed, after which the de-pauperisation of children could progress. Children within the institution received advantages of rudimentary health care, education, a largely adequate diet, and serviceable if sometimes overcrowded accommodation. This was generally superior to the material conditions experienced by poor children living at home. This was not always true of all Unions and Crompton contrasts the fortunes of children in Dudley and Martley workhouses and argues that these different responses to the central authorities' rules and regulations were the result of local conditions, previous experience of the Old Poor Law and on the character and personalities of Guardians and officers. Martley Union continued after 1847 to adhere rigorously to the principle of less eligibility, even with respect to children, whereas Dudley offered more to paupers, particularly children, than would be expected under less eligibility practices.²⁶¹ This contrast in policy also arose in Shropshire unions.

The architecture and design of workhouses is mentioned only peripherally by Crompton but is viewed with more significance by Morrison and Lance Smith, nationally by the former and locally by the latter. In his substantial article Smith

²⁶⁰ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 230.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

analyses Shropshire workhouse buildings and their influence on the treatment of inmates.²⁶²

In her survey of workhouse buildings K. Morrison describes early provision for poor children. Some of the early single mixed workhouses whilst not providing a separate building for children did write the word 'playground' on the plans instead of boys or girls 'yard' as they did for adults.²⁶³ That is perhaps only a symbolic gesture but an indication that the architects and Guardians recognise how children spent part of their time. Later additions were arcaded play sheds in children's yards/playgrounds. In the 1850s and 1860s detached workhouse schools were sometimes built, recognising the importance of education as an activity separate from the workhouse.

Matching building provision to the number and needs of inmates was also an issue in nineteenth century London. London grew rapidly in the nineteenth century, with migration from the provinces, rapid urban growth and a disconnect with settlement parishes, causing difficulties in dealing with the very poor.²⁶⁴ One partial solution to this lay with indoor maintenance. The use of the workhouse also stopped the abuse of multiple requests for relief from individuals. That indoor relief was conducted in a variety of institutions such as District Schools, farms for paupers, asylums and workhouses. In 1776, London already had 80 workhouses. New workhouse building in London did not occur until the 1850s, thus lacking an architectural target for Anti-Poor Law protest.

An unsustainable system reached crisis point in the 1860s and some parishes received extra migrants without local settlement, simultaneously with a declining tax

²⁶² L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 219. Smith's article consists of one hundred and thirty four pages and comprises the entire contents of Shropshire Archaeological Society Volume LXXXII (2007).

²⁶³ K. Morrison, *Workhouse* (English Heritage 1999), pp. 131 – 154.

²⁶⁴ D. Green, *Pauper Capital; London and the Poor Law, 1790 – 1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

base. Other parishes had fewer paupers but many rate-payers. The solution came with the 1867 Metropolitan Poor Act which redistributed relief costs, thus requiring wealthy parishes to support poor parishes. Significantly for children, women constituted 69% of those relieved in London. Disappointingly, particularly in view of the number of pauper children in London, Green does not write more about children's experience in London workhouses, or the contracting establishments and the district schools.

In his article on pauper protests Green writes that with the negative aura that surrounded the concept of the workhouses and the deterrent value of the New Poor Law, London workhouse officers found it difficult to keep order.²⁶⁵ The forms of protest were not necessarily attempts to improve conditions in the house, but stemmed from a need to assert respectability and self-esteem against a regime which failed to recognise paupers' strengths and individuality. Green describes the London workhouses as 'deeply contested site(s) of resistance'.²⁶⁶

The anti-poor law attitudes of the London workhouse poor have parallels with the Anti-Poor Law movement in the north of England. Rose, Knott and Edsall show that resentment of the New Poor Law also existed in the north.²⁶⁷ This protest was centred in the West Riding of Yorkshire and the textile towns and villages of Lancashire. It was later to be subsumed into the Chartist Movement. Much of the antagonism to post-1834 workhouses centred around their use as a punitive measure.

²⁶⁵ D. R. Green, 'Pauper protests: power and resistance in early nineteenth-century London workhouses', *Social History* Vol. 31 No. 2 May 2006, pp. 138 - 159.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 159.

²⁶⁷ M. E. Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England', *Northern History* I (1966), pp. 70 - 91; J. Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (St. Martin's Press, 1986); N. Edsall, *The anti-Poor Law movement 1834 - 1844* (Manchester University Press, 1971).

Extending the concept of childhood to pregnant mothers Nutt and Cody examine the treatment of unmarried mothers, who could only be relieved in the workhouse, and were initially denied official support for affiliation orders.²⁶⁸ This reinforced the concept of the workhouse as a punitive measure and contrasts with the Government's desire to reduce the poor rate. Only offering relief in the workhouse was an expensive option and probably also a long-term option, since in the workhouse the mother could not progress towards independence.

The subject of institutional diet, including workhouses and prisons is extensively written about by Valerie Johnson.²⁶⁹ She describes the food that workhouse inmates ate and assesses the diets nutritional content and calorific value. This concern about the quality of workhouse food was supported by rumours of deliberately or accidentally poisonous food, even to the extent of a ballad called the 'Workhouse Boy' who fell into the soup vat and became part of the soup.²⁷⁰

Using working class autobiographies, Tomkins examines workhouse conditions and people's reaction to them.²⁷¹ One might expect that workhouse inmates who chose to write about their experiences might want to emphasise the vicissitudes of living in the house and take the acceptable or good for granted, as modern critics of the National Health Service seem to do. This appears not to be so, and while some record the material and emotional severity of the house, others cited life in the workhouse as preferable to the uncertainties of life outside. A workhouse provided a protection against the problems of lack of adequate food and housing, and it provided

²⁶⁸ T. Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *Economic History Review*, 63, 2 (2010), pp. 334 – 361; L. Cody, 'The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Winter 2000), pp 132 - 156.

²⁶⁹ V. J. Johnson, *Diet in Workhouses and Prisons 1835 – 1895* (Garland, 1985).

²⁷⁰ J. Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads* (London, 1888), p. 351.

²⁷¹ A. Tomkins, 'Hell with the lid off? Re-evaluating the English workhouse from working-class autobiographies, 1834 – 1948', unpublished article, 2014.

a community of approximate equals. Village and town communities are not necessarily welcoming to social or economic outsiders. Shropshire Unions tended to build new workhouses away from population centres. Tomkins shows that workhouse life was more congenial if you were accompanied by a sibling of approximately similar age and sex. The autobiographers often mentioned caring staff who made the workhouse less of an institution. Again this resonates with the Shropshire experience.

Framing the Question

Some historians raise issues about the motivation for a nationwide construction of workhouses, and the ability of those institutions to meet the needs of inmates. For poor children in Shropshire workhouses in the middle decades of the nineteenth century the central issues were the ability of the workhouse and its staff to look after their day-to-day physical and moral needs and to equip them to lead independent adult lives and to play a valuable part in society in the future.

One striking fact about children in the workhouse was the large number of child inmates, particularly in proportion to the other categories of inmate. This chapter will determine the actual numbers of children in Shropshire workhouses, their age distribution and their percentage of the whole inmate body.

With large numbers of children resident in workhouses, one question that is important to seek answers to is an all-encompassing one, namely how far was there a mismatch between workhouses designed to contain and discipline agricultural labourers, and workhouses with a large proportion of children with different needs to

adult paupers. Within that paramount question this chapter will examine the children's experiences under three broad headings, spatial, material and moral.

Some Shropshire workhouses served rural Unions and some served a mixture of urban and rural parishes. The urban/rural dichotomy placed different demands on the workhouse, with rural paupers demand being partly seasonal and demand for space in urban workhouses being dependent on industrial recession. Shropshire workhouses were built over more than one generation. Some houses were built in the late eighteenth century, some in the 1830s and some were built in the 1850s and the 1870s. For those which were built as a House of Industry in the eighteenth century, those built after the Poor Law Amendment Act, and for those Unions which used existing poor/workhouses until later in the century, the same questions apply. Were they overcrowded? Were the buildings suitable for children? For those Unions that maintained separate houses which enabled children to have a dedicated workhouse solely for their own use, did they meet children's needs better than the single mixed workhouse? The stereotypical workhouse design was a prison-like structure designed to be intimidating. Was the stereotypical design used in Shropshire, or were the county's workhouses built to a more sympathetic style?

For inmates of all ages, meal times represent a chance to refuel, an opportunity to gather together, and a way of compartmentalising a dull day. In the early years of the New Poor Law, the central authorities' regulations demanded silence at mealtimes, but this was rescinded in 1842. Children's dietary requirements are complex, with the twin needs of replacing calories used by active youngsters and a diet designed to foster growing bodies. The workhouse regime was required to be

less-eligible, meaning it to be less congenial than that of independent labourers, and diet had potential as a method of achieving that aim.

This raises many questions. Did the Central Authorities reconcile less eligible diet with the moral requirement to ensure inmates' health, inmates for whose health the Poor Law was responsible and if not, how did that impact on less eligibility? Was the diet of poor independent Shropshire labourers good enough to be undercut without endangering health? Irrespective of the arguments over the feasibility of less eligibility were workhouse dietaries adequate for the health and growth of child inmates? Where Shropshire Unions felt that dietaries were inadequate did they have the local power to amend these dietaries and did they choose to exercise that power? Did Guardians' or officers' concerns about improving dietaries imply a more caring attitude to inmates instead of the stereotypical relationship based on the exercise of power, punishment and less eligibility? As an extension to this question was there discord between Guardians eager to reduce costs, and union medical officers conscious of their duties to their patients?

Under the moral heading the questions that this chapter will seek to answer are many. Initially it is important to establish whether the Poor Law Amendment Act and subsequent circulars and consolidated orders established regulations as to how Workhouse life should meet the needs of children. Children in an institutional building with often nobody to protect their interests were very vulnerable to a regime and staff that was not constrained by effective rules, diligently implemented. The need for a rule based institution was made more significant because Poor Law Unions implemented the system at a local level, with limited outside inspection and supervision.

If the national regulatory structure on life in the workhouse was worthwhile it needed to be implemented in Shropshire workhouses. This chapter examines national regulations and the quality of their local implementation. Regulations and rules provide a safety net below which workhouse officers' behaviour should not fall, but did those same rules and regulations limit the capacity of those officers and the Union to a non-aspirational norm? Children have varying needs and there were organisations such as The Marine Society and the Magdalene Asylums in the mid-nineteenth century that attempted to cater for those needs, but did the Shropshire Unions step beyond the non-aspirational norm to take advantage of outside agencies in the interest of their child inmates?

Spatial Issues

The population of Britain doubled in the first half of the nineteenth century and increased rapidly during the second half. The proportion of the population under 14 also increased rapidly during the century and was at least a third of the total population and for a long period was closer to 40% of the total. As a comparison, in 1960 the proportion of children under 14 was approximately 20% of the total.²⁷² This increase in the youthful population was well-represented in Poor Law statistics. A report of 1839 identified children under 16 as forming nearly half of the national workhouse population, (42,767 out of a total of 97,510).²⁷³ In 1841 the number of children in Shropshire Workhouses (not including workhouses of undissolved Incorporations) was 644. This comprised 57% of the total inmate population. By

²⁷² P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation – an economic history of Britain 1700 – 1914* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 200.

²⁷³ Parliamentary Papers, 1840, XVII (226), *Report on the Continuance of the Poor Law Commission*, 1839, p. 34.

1851 the numbers of children in Shropshire Workhouses had decreased to 601 and was then only 46% of the inmate population. In 1861 the Shropshire child inmate population was 487, being 41% of the workhouse population. It is clear that as a proportion of inmates, children made up a very large proportion, remarkably so given the lack of interest in them in the Poor Law Report or in the 1834 Act. The figures show that children were a large proportion of the Shropshire workhouse population in 1841, 1851 and 1861.²⁷⁴

This section outlines the manner in which the Shropshire Poor Law Unions set about the business of catering for in-maintenance children. A characteristic of Shropshire Unions is their variety. They varied in size and composition with some having a populace engaged in industry, some largely rural with a central market town and one, Atcham, rural with no market town. Shropshire Unions had a varied background, some in the north of the county with a history of workhouse building and integration of parish relief policies, and many with a background as lone parishes, integrated only by the 1834 Act. These varied backgrounds contributed to differing levels of commitment to the concept of the workhouse. The post 1834 development of county workhouses can usefully be characterised in three groups: those large workhouses built before the Poor Law Amendment Act and in imitation of the Shrewsbury House of Industry, those of the Shropshire Coalfield and those of the predominantly rural part of the county. Within the last section Ludlow Workhouse will be analysed in depth. Ludlow workhouse has been selected for this because it was newly built on an empty site in the 1830s, so it clearly represents the views of the Guardians

²⁷⁴ For Figures see Appendices 1a, 1b and 1c., pp. 342 – 345. The statistics for Appendices 1a, 1b and 1c are extracted from Census Returns for Shropshire of 1841 (1a), 1851 (1b) and 1861 (1c). They indicate that Shropshire workhouses had a large population of children compared to adults. In 1841 children constituted 57% of the workhouse total. In 1851 children constituted 47% of the workhouse total and in 1861 children constituted 41% of the workhouse total.

influenced by the Poor Law Commission and unaffected by conversion of earlier buildings. Ludlow Union's extensive records have valuable architect's drawings of its workhouse and the progress in its construction (or occasional lack of it) is recorded in the Guardians' Minute Books.

This section will show that Shropshire Unions used a variety of strategies to establish a building for in-maintenance. Some inherited large workhouses from Incorporations, which avoided the need to build anew. Some with a scepticism about the value of workhouses chose not to build a new one even though the inherited accommodation was inadequate. Other rural Unions sought to build impractically large workhouses which were never likely to be full.

There were advantages and disadvantages for paupers in each case. Maintaining a small or medium size house after the 1834 Act was likely to offer fewer facilities (such as adequate yards and infirmaries) but it avoided the problems of large scale institutions, such as the need for more organisation and discipline and an impersonal regime. Wellington and Newport and Bridgnorth solved the problem of large numbers in a small workhouse by using another house for children and Madeley used the small house at Broseley for the very old. Just as the largely urban Coalfield Unions chose not to build prestigious buildings, the opposite occurred in the rural Unions where their sense of self-importance caused them to build very large workhouses, outstripping the size of the potential inmate population. The rural Unions that did that were Cleobury Mortimer, Drayton and Wem. Nationally, Poor Law Union Guardians are often characterised as parsimonious but some Shropshire Unions were enthusiastic about spending ratepayers' money on over-large workhouses. Perhaps these were examples of civic pride. Shifnal's building of 1817

was clearly an example of civic pride, and the Drayton Union wanted to build as big a workhouse as they could afford, despite a lack of inmates and were only prevented by the Poor Law Board, who recognised that the workhouse would be disproportionately large. The stereotypical workhouse was also envisaged as an intimidating building, but the houses at Ludlow, Shifnal, Bridgnorth and Clun/Bishops Castle had decorative architectural features that belied intimidation.

The Workhouses established before 1834 with particular reference to child accommodation

Atcham, Ellesmere, Oswestry and Whitchurch established workhouses in the late eighteenth century, in imitation of the then successful Shrewsbury Incorporation's House of Industry and they were all substantial buildings. The Ellesmere workhouse regularly housed 200 in the 1790s, with numbers for 1797 of 50 men, 34 women and 114 children and a local census in 1821 which shows 184 males and 112 females in residence, but with no separate numbers for children.²⁷⁵

An indication of the size and capacity of Ellesmere workhouse can be gained from the list of rooms in 1856 in Appendix 2.²⁷⁶ The descriptions of these rooms are imprecise, since there are a girls' bedroom, a boys' ward, and also a children's bedroom, which is the largest of the three. That creates difficulty in establishing how much space was allocated to children. Children made up slightly less than 46% of the total population at the 1851 census. Adding together the square footage of rooms labelled 'Boys' school, Girls' school, Children under 7, Girls' bedroom,

²⁷⁵ SA: XP 105/V/1/1.

²⁷⁶ The list is in Appendix 2.

Children's bedroom and Boys' ward' the square footage allocated specifically to children was 4,020 square feet.

Adding together the square footage of rooms labelled 'Old men, Old women, Able-bodied women, Able-bodied women's bedroom, Old women's bedroom, Married Women's bedroom, and Old men's ward, the space allocated specifically to adults was 4,456 square feet. Therefore the space specifically allocated to children was 47% of the total workhouse space with 53% allocated to adults. Since children made up 46% of the total inmate population the space allocated to children seems fair and appropriate.

Workhouses of Industrial East Shropshire

The Unions of the coalfield were Newport, Shifnal, Wellington and Madeley and they were determined to 'make do' with the buildings they already had. Shifnal had the most modern workhouse, but had also a history of providing work for the poor and using the workhouse as an incentive for the poor to co-operate with make-work programmes. The vestry minutes of 1816 describe the original poor house as very unfit and unwholesome.²⁷⁷ At the same time it was well known that Thomas Telford, the Shropshire County Surveyor was planning to upgrade the Holyhead Road through Shropshire generally and Shifnal in particular, and the vestry decided to make the refurbished workhouse a prestigious building, impressive to people in the passing traffic. After refurbishment in the late 1810s the building looked like an impressive municipal building but not particularly like a workhouse, so was not visually

²⁷⁷ SA: P 246/C/1/1, Shifnal Vestry Minutes, 3 August 1816.

intimidating to the poor.²⁷⁸ After 1834 the Workhouse needed to meet the needs of 15 parishes, so had to be further expanded. The Guardians thought the capacity should be 200, but its official capacity was 150.²⁷⁹ The inventory of wards shows that if the workhouse was full to its capacity of 200, healthy people including children were expected to sleep two to a bed, but ill paupers had a bed each.

Census returns show that it was only full, however, for a brief period. The 1841 Census shows 43 inmates rising to 57 in 1851.²⁸⁰ However it became very full during the industrial recession in the 1840s. In 1842 numbers reached 195, and 214 in 1843.²⁸¹ In 1861 the workhouse population was 47, so there was ample accommodation, except at critical times.²⁸² The Shifnal Guardians did make an attempt to send their child inmates to the Newport Union school at Lilleshall, but Lord Sutherland, the owner of the school and Chairman of Newport Guardians refused to allow children from other Unions to attend the school.²⁸³

The Newport Guardians did not embrace the New Poor Law with either enthusiasm or alacrity, and were content not to build anew but to use the existing houses. They inherited five poorhouses, and decided to use the one at Gnosall in Staffordshire for children. The Quarterly Return of 1837 shows that of 776 paupers, only 22 women, 24 men and 38 children were in workhouses, so Newport's commitment to out-relief meant that their workhouse strategy of 'making do' would be successful. The Newport Workhouse (probably built in the 1780s) was not an imposing building but

²⁷⁸ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 70.

²⁷⁹ *Bagshaw's Gazeteer of Shropshire 1851*, p. 475.

²⁸⁰ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 72.

²⁸¹ SA: PL 13/4, Shifnal Minute Book, 17 July 1843.

²⁸² *England and Wales Census 1861*, Shifnal.

²⁸³ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 72.

had high ceilings, similar to Madeley and Bridgnorth and may be indicative of paupers working on looms in the pre-1834 house.²⁸⁴

In 1855 the Newport Guardians came under severe pressure from the Poor Law Board to build a new workhouse, and decided to dispense with the small houses at Newport (Workhouse Lane) and Gnosall and build a new workhouse at Audley Avenue, Newport. The children were removed from Gnosall in 1858 and were sent to the South East Shropshire Industrial School at Quatt.²⁸⁵

Wellington inherited a workhouse in Walker Street, and it was improved in 1836. The Walker Street workhouse was generally sufficient in capacity except in times of industrial recession. In 1843 it had 210 inmates, even though the Poor Law Commission had placed a limit of 159 on its capacity. As a solution to this William Day, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, authorised the Guardians to allow 48 families to go home with out-relief if the breadwinner stayed in the House, which was not what the framers of the 1834 legislation envisaged. The Guardians also inherited a workhouse between Ercall Magna and Waters Upton, and they decided to use that for children and in 1841 that workhouse contained 38 children.²⁸⁶

Little is known about the condition of the Ercall Magna workhouse but in November 1841 Assistant Commissioner William Gilbert complained that both boys and girls played together in the same yard, and that the classroom was small and badly ventilated, and there was no sick ward. The Guardians assured Gilbert they would correct the faults as soon as they had completed the purchase of the building from

²⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 64 – 65.

²⁸⁵ SA: 3990/12, Agreement between guardians and school authority.

²⁸⁶ National Library of Wales: MS 25, William Day correspondence.

the Ercall Magna vestry.²⁸⁷ In 1843 William Day, who had resumed his previous duties in Shropshire and Wales wrote that he wished to return some Ercall Magna children to their homes with a payment of out-relief.²⁸⁸ The implication of this wish to return children is that some children must have had families to return to, so were not orphans. In 1851 the Ercall Magna Workhouse had a capacity of 100 but the average number of children was fifty.²⁸⁹

After the crisis of 1843 it was another 33 years until the building of the new Wellington workhouse in Street Lane (Watling Street). It was symptomatic of workhouses in industrial north-east Shropshire that they were generally suitable for the purpose except at a time of industrial recession, so perhaps there was no motivation for the Guardians to build anew.

There were similar problems in Madeley Workhouse in the early 1840s and it became so full that the Union asked the Poor Law Commission to allow the able-bodied to be given out-relief. In 1863 a Poor Law Board architect inspected the Madeley workhouse, reported it as old and dilapidated and recommended the construction of a new house, costing approximately £5,000.²⁹⁰ The Guardians built a new workhouse in 1874, to accommodate 200 inmates, even though the 1851 census showed 54 inmates in the old house and 39 inmates in 1861.²⁹¹ In practice the original workhouse was only ever full in 1842 so apart from that year, the house had plentiful space for inmates of all ages.

²⁸⁷ TNA: MH 12/10060, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union 1841 – 1842, Wellington Union Clerk to Poor Law Commission, November 1841.

²⁸⁸ National Library of Wales: MS 3149F, 14 April 1843.

²⁸⁹ *Bagshaw's Gazetteer of Shropshire 1851*, p. 421.

²⁹⁰ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 79.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, Ch. 4.

Rural Workhouses post-1834

In 1834 the Bridgnorth Union inherited a workhouse in both St. Leonard's and St. Mary's, the two parishes of Bridgnorth, and both were in use in the early years after 1834. St. Leonard's had 32 inmates in 1841, and St. Mary's had 25. Neither was in use at the 1851 Census, and had been superseded by a new attractive building in Innage Lane. It was designed to accommodate 200 inmates though only 67 were recorded in 1851 and 55 in 1861.²⁹² The small numbers were partly because the children were housed at Quatt.

The major priority for Bridgnorth Guardians was to enable pauper children to avoid pauperism in adulthood and they did so by establishing a school at Quatt. A description of the education provided there is contained in the Education Chapter but a description of conditions at Quatt is also significant here. This school was later housed in the former Dower House on the Dudmaston Estate, owned by William Wolryche Whitmore, the Chairman of Bridgnorth Guardians. In 1841 there were 42 children there. In 1845 four acres of land were bought to enable the boys to be taught farm work. Later this land holding was increased to ten acres. The children were allowed extra food compared to normal workhouse diets because of their physical work. Henry Garland, the Quatt schoolmaster, wrote in 1848 that the school would admit children from other Unions and also the children of parents receiving out-relief.²⁹³ But here is no record of admitting children on out-relief. The school was self-sufficient in food production and marketed the surplus.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Ibid, p. 84.

²⁹³ SA: PL 9/38/1/14-15, Bridgnorth Poor Law Union, H. Garland, 'Some facts respecting the farm school at Quatt' pamphlet, 1848.

²⁹⁴ See Chapter 4.

Other Shropshire unions began to send children to the school, which led to a period of enlargement. By 1851 Quatt housed 39 children, in 1861 it housed 106. In 1859 the school had a capacity for 170 children. By 1868 it was reported that it had a capacity of 200 with an actual population of 160 - 170.²⁹⁵ At the time of the 1871 census it had a roll of 190 and received children from Bridgnorth, Cleobury Mortimer, Madeley, Newport and Shifnal, as well as from a mainly Staffordshire Union based at Seisdon.²⁹⁶

One advantage for the children of these Unions was that by being sent to the school they were removed from the general mixed workhouse with all its contradictions of purpose. They were also all part of an educational institution founded for and dedicated to the sole purpose of education and preparation for an independent life outside of the poor relief structures. One of the problems with paupers' schools established in London was their sheer size, but the school at Quatt had a manageable population of 39 in 1851 rising to 160 – 170 in 1868, which would have allowed it to be less institutional with staff and children knowing each other as people.

²⁹⁷

The other rural unions were Church Stretton, Cleobury Mortimer, Clun, Drayton and Wem. The most remarkable thing about these unions is not that they built new workhouses (in Cleobury they enlarged an existing house) but that they built such large workhouses. Church Stretton Union was the most conservative and built a house with a capacity of 120. In 1841, 1851 and 1861 that workhouse had

²⁹⁵ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 87.

²⁹⁶ Seisdon Poor Law Union was formed in 1836 consisting of 11 parishes in Staffordshire and Rudge in Shropshire.

²⁹⁷ Hanwell School, Middlesex, had a roll of 1200, Drouet's School, Tooting, had a roll of 1400, and the South Metropolitan School, located in Sutton, Surrey, but serving south London unions had a roll of 890. www.workhouses.org.uk/education/workhouse.shtml.

populations of 54, 65 and 46 respectively.²⁹⁸ It was never crowded, but was poorly designed in terms of demarcated space for classification of paupers and the provision of privies.²⁹⁹ Cleobury Mortimer Guardians enlarged their workhouse, but its capacity is not clear and in 1841, 1851 and 1861 its population was 45, 76 and 33 respectively.³⁰⁰

Clun's workhouse was built at Bishops Castle, which was the market town of the Union. It is identified by Smith as 'simplified domestic Tudor (described in the specification as 'Elizabethan')'.³⁰¹ In common with Church Stretton it had poor sanitation provision with one privy with soil pit to each yard, even though the Union was anticipating a total population of 150. There was planned to have been one water-closet but that was not installed. With a capacity of 150, it had populations of 75 (1841), 68 (1851) and 86 (1861), so it was little more than half-full.³⁰² During the discussions on design William Day advised/ordered the Guardians to abandon their idea for a detached hospital but told them to include a dining room in their design because that would enable families to dine together.³⁰³ This concept of families dining together contrasts vividly with stereotypical photos of serried single-sex ranks of paupers eating facing the same way.

The Drayton Guardians initially wished to build 'as big a workhouse as they could afford'. The Poor Law Board withdrew approval and the Workhouse size was

²⁹⁸ Thesis, Appendices, 1a, 1b, 1c.

²⁹⁹ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p.88 – 90.

³⁰⁰ Thesis, Appendices, 1a, 1b, 1c.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 96.

³⁰² Thesis Appendices, 1a, 1b, 1c.

³⁰³ National Library of Wales, MS 3142, William Day - Letter to Poor Law Commission, 18 August 1842.

reduced to 128.³⁰⁴ The Drayton workhouse population was 84 (1841), 86 (1851) and 66 (1861) so there was always spare capacity.³⁰⁵

Wem built a new workhouse capable of housing 200 inmates, but its actual population was quite low: 72 (1841), 64 (1851) and 69 (1861), so it was never more than a third full.³⁰⁶ The tendency for some Shropshire Unions to desire large workhouses is significant because a large workhouse allied to a small pauper population meant that there was space in the workhouse, resulting in no overcrowding of day rooms, exercise yards, dining rooms and perhaps above all, less need for sleeping two to a bed.

Ludlow Union Workhouse – a case study

The Ludlow Guardians inherited two workhouses, one in Ludlow and one in Leintwardine. These had been viewed as unsatisfactory during the Old Poor Law so would certainly not be satisfactory after the Poor Law Amendment Act. The Guardians immediately set about building a new House on Gravel Hill, in the parish of Stanton Lacy, on Ludlow's outskirts.

The front of the building was in a Regency-Classical style and the photograph below taken later in the nineteenth century shows it to be ivy covered which softened its aspect.

³⁰⁴ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, p. 103.

³⁰⁵ Thesis Appendix 1a, 1b and 1c.

³⁰⁶ Thesis Appendix 1a, 1b and 1c.

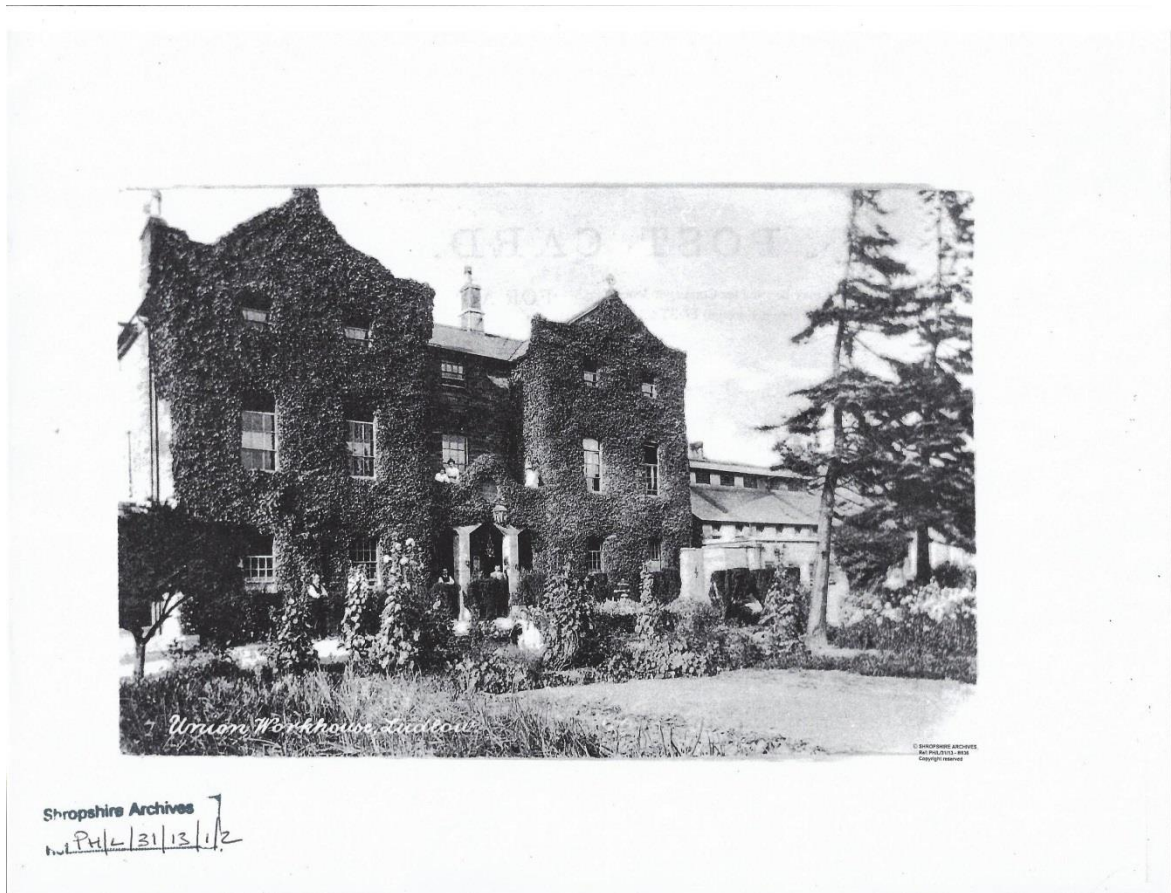


Figure 1. Ludlow Union Workhouse, late nineteenth century

Indications are that this photograph was a picture on the reverse of a postcard.

The plan shown in Figure 2 was based on a panopticon, which was an institutional building designed by Jeremy Bentham. Bentham's archetypical design was based on a circular structure with an inspection hub at its centre, thus allowing an 'inspector' or watchman to supervise the activities of those on the edge of the circle. In specifically workhouse terms a panopticon design was often a square building with a central structure with 'spokes' leading from the centre to the periphery. Inmates were housed both in the 'spokes' and on the periphery. The structure of 'spokes' leading

to a surrounding wall enabled the creation of yards for the exercise of discrete groups, thus allowing for different groups to be segregated from each other.

In Ludlow workhouse the central tower housed the chapel and dining room on the ground floor and the workhouse masters room on the first floor. The building consisted of a cross of four wings within a surrounding square. That created four large outdoor yards which were further subdivided to form eight outdoor yards. That allowed classification thus:

Male	lunatics
	able-bodied men
	infirm men
	boys
Female	lunatics
	able-bodied women
	infirm women
	girls

The ground floor consisted of day rooms, store and work rooms, infirmary, privies, kitchen, laundry, cell, chapel and dining room, with the surprising addition for an 1836 design of rooms for married couples. Crowther writes that provision for elderly couples was allowed by the Commission, but that some Commissioners regarded it as uneconomic. Regulations were relaxed in 1847 and couples over 60 were allowed a room together if they requested it and if capacity allowed.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, 1981), pp. 42 – 45.

There was a block on the north side containing an infirmary, with stairs up to sick wards with a lying-in ward, and nurses' accommodation. Two of the cross wings contained bedrooms, and one wing contained separate boys' and girls' schools and a boys' and girls' dining room. That indicates that the children ate separately from the adult inmates. This would have the effect of creating a childhood enclave, with school and dining room. With dormitories separate from adult inmates, children would have had a childhood experience separate from adult paupers. That would enable the master, matron and schoolteachers the opportunity to treat children differently from the adults. Some degree of supervision at night was important, though, as evidenced by Charles Shaw, who described psychological bullying by older boys.³⁰⁸ On a small second floor there were boys' and girls' bedrooms, with washing and toilet facilities, and matron's and master's bedrooms.

Below are copies of original plans of the Ludlow workhouse.

³⁰⁸ C. Shaw, *When I was a Child* (Caliban Books, 1986), pp. 102 - 105.

Figure 2. Ludlow Union Workhouse – Ground Floor Plan

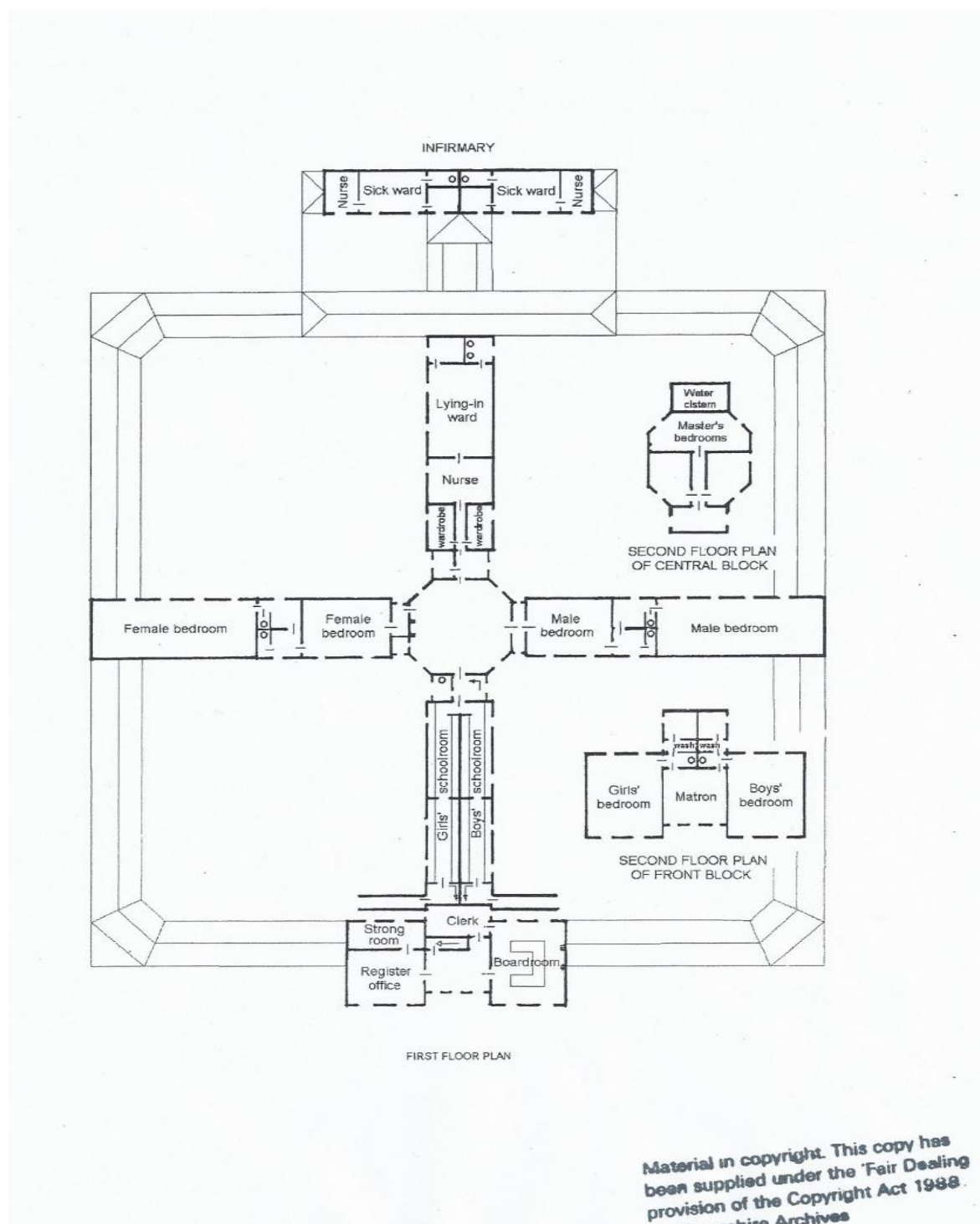


Figure 3. Ludlow Union Workhouse – First Floor Plan



Figure 4. Ludlow Union Workhouse – Plan, 1903

Despite the original cost estimate for the building being too low, and a consequent overspend, the building was constructed according to the plans and, unusual for Shropshire workhouses, did not later have to be altered except for the building for vagrants' accommodation.³⁰⁹

Most workhouses which were built between 1835 and 1840 were built to designs on the model plans published by the Commission and of those most were Samuel Kempthorne's radial design or a derivative of it. At the same time as the intimidating prison-like workhouses were being built, attempts were made in some places to lessen the image of deterrence and introduce a more welcoming façade. Ely's workhouse entrance has echoes of the Cathedral; Wells' house has a medieval frontage; Windsor's had an Elizabethan style and Amersham's looked like a collection of almshouses.³¹⁰ These were built before Ludlow's, so they could have influenced the Ludlow Guardians into softening the exterior of the building had the Guardians wished.

The Ludlow Workhouse was designed for 250 paupers, but in 1841 contained 142, in 1851 it contained 100 and in 1861 contained 96 inmates, so was generally between a third and a half empty. However, during the 1840s there were examples of a crowded lying-in ward and children with the itch being restricted to two in a bed, implying that there were usually more than two in a bed, thus making it easier for contagious diseases to spread. This indicates that workhouse accommodation was inflexible and the availability of space depended on the ward inmates occupied.

³⁰⁹ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. LXXXII, 2007, pp. 104 – 105.

³¹⁰ Kathryn Morrison, *The Workhouse* (English Heritage 1999), Ch. 5

The discussions at Guardians' meetings show that they were concerned to make good decisions regarding heating and ventilation and recognised the good work of other Unions in meeting the needs of their paupers.

As the plans show, on the ground floor were 8 separate yards for able-bodied women, infirm women, girls, able-bodied men, infirm men and boys, leaving two unallocated on the 1838 plan. Most of the ground floor rooms were used for utilitarian purposes, such as probationary ward, bakehouse, various workrooms, wash-house, laundry, Infirmary and day rooms. In addition there was provision for married couples. The first floor rooms were allocated principally to bedrooms; two female bedrooms, two male bedrooms and separate girls' and boys' bedrooms. The matron's quarters, washhouse and toilets were between the girls' and boys' rooms. There were also two boys' schoolrooms and two for girls. There was also infirmary accommodation on the first floor including a lying-in ward. The only rooms on the second floor, all in the central tower, were the master's bedroom and the water cistern.

In the new Ludlow workhouse the Guardians were able to separate the children from adult paupers, with separate dormitories, a separate dining room and the school.

Ludlow Guardians did not focus a great deal on children but children were present in their thinking, as in Wellington and Newport.

Material Issues

The prime function of Workhouse dietaries was to keep inmates alive, and acceptably healthy. The Poor Law Authorities wished the workhouse to have a deterrent quality, thus discouraging people from entering unless completely desperate and destitute. It

was therefore quite logical that the workhouse and life within it should be designed to be unattractive to paupers, and thus encourage them not to enter it. Dietaries were also used to discipline paupers, and a reduction in diet to bread and water was a regular punishment.

The Poor Law Commission took the earliest opportunity to remind Unions of their dietary duties: 'On no account must the dietary of the workhouse be superior or equal to the ordinary mode of subsistence of the labouring classes of the neighbourhood.'³¹¹

In fact, less eligibility in relation to diet was impossible to implement bearing in mind the poor diet among agricultural labourers in Shropshire and most parts of England. The Commission had no concept of a typical agricultural labourer's diet and so could not make decisions about less eligible workhouse diets and Chadwick realised the impossibility of implementing less eligible diets.³¹² The Commissioners themselves based their exemplar dietaries on Old Poor Law practice, and their concession to less eligibility was exercised through choice of ingredients.³¹³

There were six major factors influencing workhouse diets, the policies of the Poor Law Commission (1834 – 1847) and Poor Law Board (1847 – 1871); availability and price of food; number of paupers and the level of the poor rate; the intention to single out a particular category of pauper; traditions of the local area *vis-a-vis* generosity to paupers, and the influence, generous or parsimonious, of individuals such as Guardians and Medical Officers. The Poor Law Commission exercised its influence by recommending dietaries in 1835 and 1836.³¹⁴ Chapter 2 of this thesis showed that at least 75% of agricultural labourers' diets consisted of bread and potatoes with

³¹¹ Parliamentary Papers, 1836, xxix (595), *Second Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, p. 56.

³¹² S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952), p. 83.

³¹³ V. J. Johnson, *Diet in Workhouses and Prisons 1835 – 1895* (Garland, 1985), p. 17.

³¹⁴ Parliamentary Papers, *Poor Law Commission, Second Annual Report, 1836*, Appendix A, pp. 270 – 275.

meat a very rare commodity. All six of the dietaries were superior to the generality of agricultural labourers' diets.³¹⁵ In the north of the county, Dietary One was chosen in entirety by Atcham and Wellington, and Ellesmere chose it for its able-bodied inmates, and Dietary Six for its old and sick. Madeley Union selected Dietary Five.³¹⁶ The 1835 Adult Dietaries are contained in Appendix 3. Their significance for children is that those over 9 years old received women's portions.

The central authorities were compliant to Unions' wishes to amend their dietaries provided they did not differ from the tenets of the New Poor Law or were not very different from neighbouring Unions. Perhaps some Unions chose not to seek permission when they amended dietaries. The result was that by 1850 dietaries became very varied and it became difficult to describe a typical example.³¹⁷

The central and northern Shropshire Unions soon realised that the dietaries did not offer enough food and asked the Poor Law Commission for changes. The Commission had an unwritten policy of agreeing to dietary changes.³¹⁸ Atcham and Ellesmere changed their dietaries more than once in the first two years. Wellington added 4 oz. of bread to meals that only contained soup. Atcham doubled potato portions and increased bread allowance in 1837.³¹⁹

There were some aspects of the dietaries which were common to all. These were that dietary cycles would be repeated weekly and that inmates would receive three

³¹⁵ The Dietaries can be seen in Appendix 3.

³¹⁶ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1970, p. 260

³¹⁷ V. J. Johnston, *Diet in Workhouses and Prisons 1835 – 1895* (Garland, 1985), p. 108.

³¹⁸ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1970, p. 261.

³¹⁹ TNA: MH 12/9935, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Ellesmere Union, 1834 -1842, Poor Law Commission to the Ellesmere Clerk, 27 April 1837, 10 October 1837; MH 12/9822, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, Atcham Clerk to Poor Law Commission, 10 January 1837, 18 September 1837, 9 October 1837; MH 12/10059, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1834 – 1840, Wellington Clerk to the Poor Law Commission, 9 September 1836.

meals a day.³²⁰ Men received more food than women. In the early decade of the New Poor Law children's dietary needs were not thought about in any significant way and children over 9 were generally given the same food as able-bodied women, with the medical officer offering advice on diets for children who were ill. This last point probably means that ill children were adequately fed.

Bread was almost universally common in workhouse diets, except where oatmeal was regionally important. At breakfast gruel or porridge was served with the bread. Both gruel and porridge were made with oatmeal and water, gruel containing less oatmeal. Salt was occasionally added but sugar was not common until after 1870. Porridge made with milk and water was sometimes given at breakfast. Supper, or the evening meal, was generally the same as breakfast, but sometimes consisted of bread and cheese.

The midday meal generally consisted of four types: meat and potatoes; pudding; soup; and bread and cheese. Dietary number 1 (Appendix 3) contained meat three times a week, Dietary 2 contained meat pudding once a week, Dietary 3 contained meat twice a week, Dietary 4 contained meat or meat pudding twice a week and Dietary 5 contained meat twice. In stark contrast, in Ulverston, Lancashire, meat, bacon or fish was served 5 days a week with soup or liquid made from meat on the other two days. Nationally, meat was usually boiled. Suet pudding was made with flour, suet and water and eaten with nothing other than salt, and one portion generally weighed between 10 and 16 oz.³²¹

³²⁰ Parliamentary Papers, *Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, xi (327), p. 455. The Poor Law Commissioners recommended only two meals per day for adult paupers in Irish workhouses.

³²¹ V. J. Johnston, *Diet in Workhouses and Prisons 1835 – 1895* (Garland, 1985), p. 111.

Availability of ingredients also influenced workhouse food. Regional items such as oatmeal and oatcakes were eaten in parts of the north of England, and fish was cheap and available in coastal areas. Conspicuously lacking in dietaries is the mention of vegetables and fruit except potatoes. These were likely to be eaten if the workhouse had a productive garden, as there was at Quatt in Bridgnorth Poor Law Union, and Ercall Magna, in Wellington Poor Law Union, tended by child inmates. Cheapness was certain to be a factor in choosing ingredients and cheap ingredients might imply adulteration. There is clear evidence that Shropshire Unions dealt with the problem of adulterated and poor quality food. Earlier on, the Ludlow Guardians showed that they were prepared to challenge suppliers over quality of provisions. In August 1841 they reprimanded Mr. Whatmore over deficiencies in weight and quality of his bread. A month later they had to make a similar criticism and in consequence they cancelled his contract with the Union.³²² There was also an occasion when the Guardians cancelled a supplier's contract because of poor quality bacon.³²³ These examples offer clear evidence that the Guardians and officers of some Shropshire Unions took steps to ensure the standard of paupers' nutrition.

Port was often prescribed by Union medical officers for medicinal purposes. In 1863 the Clerk recorded that the Ludlow inmates complained about the quality of the port offered to them. The Guardians decided to seek another supplier.³²⁴ There were also two occasions in which the Madeley Guardians issued warnings to suppliers about meat quality.³²⁵ Union action over poor quality provisions improved the diet for all inmates including children. Special meals on special occasions, and food parcels

³²² SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 4 August 1841, p. 43 and PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minutes, 29 September 1841, p. 59.

³²³ SA: PL 9/2/1/10, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1861 – 1865, 6 November 1863, p. 188.

³²⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 6 November 1862, p. 188.

³²⁵ SA: PL 10/2, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1848, 5 January 1837, p. 77 and PL 10/3, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1840 – 1845, 19 January 1844, p. 306.

from friends were banned.³²⁶ This had little effect in Ludlow because meals on special occasions did happen, and Ludlow Union was able to marry its adherence to the 1834 Act to a concern to improve the quality of inmates' lives. In October 1839 a body with the august name 'The Committee of Management for Regaling the Poor of Ludlow' asked the Board if they could provide, at no cost to the Union, '80 lbs of Mutton, Buns and Plum Pudding with a pint of Beer for each Adult pauper in the House'. They hoped that this would happen on 5th November 'to celebrate the coming of age of Viscount Clive'.³²⁷ It was carried unanimously. Sir Edmund Head, the Assistant Commissioner, disapproved of the affair and requested that it not be repeated. But it was. In December 1840 the 'Mayor and ratepayers and respectable inhabitants of the Borough of Ludlow' requested that the Guardians allow the paupers 'to enjoy a good and substantial Roast Beef and Plum Pudding Dinner on Christmas Day with a small portion of beer'.³²⁸ It was to celebrate Christmas but also the birth of the Princess Royal. The Guardians agreed with the proviso that 'no more than a pint of beer to be given to each adult and half a pint for every child (except infants) under the age of 16 years'. There is no evidence that they asked the Poor Law Commissioners for permission or contacted Sir Edmund Head. Nothing of this kind happened for three years and then in 1844 the Guardians themselves subscribed to a fund to provide a Roast Beef and Plum Pudding dinner with a pint of beer for each adult and half a pint for children.³²⁹

The Poor Law Commission's attitude was that Roast Beef and Plum Pudding could constitute a luxury and therefore would attack the principle of less eligibility, but the

³²⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1842, xix (389), *Eighth Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, p. 72.

³²⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/2, Ludlow Minute Book, 1838 – 1840, 23 October 1839, p. 149.

³²⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/3, Ludlow Minute Book, 1839 – 1841, 16 December 1840, p. 132.

³²⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/5, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1843 – 1845, 18 December 1844, p. 192.

custom of providing Roast Beef for the poor was well established.³³⁰ Roast Beef was regarded as traditional 'Old English Fare' and eaten at festive occasions and Christmas was a festival when many Victorians chose to share home comforts with the poor.³³¹

Many Boards of Guardians either provided their own personal money to provide festive food or allowed other philanthropic groups to do so.³³² The Poor Law Commission responded in March 1840 by issuing a circular to Unions allowing the practice of providing special food on particular occasions but specifically said that the cost was not to be borne by ratepayers but by individuals. Durbach cites many examples of Unions paying for Roast Beef and Plum Pudding out of the poor-rate.³³³ By 1847 the edict against Christmas Dinner had been rescinded.³³⁴

Periodically in the Ludlow Union Minutes there are lists of commodities purchased. These lists show little change from year to year, and reflect the meals given to inmates. Both beef and mutton were purchased with beef bought in much larger quantities than mutton, but no pork. In contrast to this evidence Durbach writes that bacon and salt pork were the most common meats served in workhouses.³³⁵ She draws her references from an 1837 document, and the Ludlow Union Minutes date

³³⁰ J. A. R. Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas* (Branch Line 1978), pp. 49 – 58.

³³¹ J. Twigg, 'Vegetarianism and the Meaning of Meat', in Ann Murcott (ed.) *The Sociology of Food and Eating*, (Aldershot, 1983), pp. 25 – 26; E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983) passim and J. A. R. Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas* (Branch Line, 1978), pp. 85 - 96.

³³² N. Durbach, 'Roast Beef, the New Poor Law, and the British Nation, 1834 – 63', *Journal of British Studies*, October 2013, Vol. 52 Issue 4, pp. 970 – 976.

³³³ Ibid, pp. 979 – 985.

³³⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1847 - 48, xxxiii (1960), *Fourteenth Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, p. 18.

³³⁵ N. Durbach, 'Roast Beef, the New Poor Law, and the British Nation, 1834 – 63', *Journal of British Studies*, October 2013, Vol. 52 Issue 4, p. 966.

from 1840, so there is no significant time difference.³³⁶ Durbach is describing what may be a national picture whereas the Union minutes portray the events in Ludlow at the time. The 'seconds' flour which was bought was not as finely milled as white flour and contained more bran and husks and suggests the baking of bread. This is confirmed by the presence of a bakehouse on the ground floor of the Ludlow Workhouse. The purchase of hops suggests brewing of beer but there is no brewhouse on the workhouse plans.³³⁷ Guardians ordered two different grades of tea, presumably the more expensive grade for the officers.³³⁸

Edward Smith was appointed in the middle 1860s as medical officer of the Poor Law Board. He was proactive during the Lancashire Cotton Famine and he examined how unemployed mill workers could be most efficiently relieved. He established the amount of food that an average working man needed to maintain health and energy. In modern terms he showed that 2,600 calories was a suitable daily intake for a working man.³³⁹ To develop his ideas he undertook a survey of northern workhouses to determine what type, amount and quality of food was given to inmates. He further developed that by suggesting limited changes in diet, but more far-reaching changes in cooking, presentation and nutritional value of food. His aim was to produce a diet that would enable inmates 'to obtain the greatest possible amount of nourishment from it, and that amount which shall maintain growth, health and strength'.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1837, *Eighth Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act*, (278) (24 – 25); Parliamentary Papers 1837, *Ninth Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act*, (296), 2.

³³⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/3, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1839 – 1841, 19 February 1839, p. 32; 18 March 1840, p. 44; 25 March 1840, p. 46; 15 April 1840, pp. 52, 53; 10 June 1840, p. 65; 24 June 1840, p. 70.

³³⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/3, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1839 – 1841, 18 March 1840, p. 44.

³³⁹ P. Higginbotham, *The Workhouse Cookbook* (The History Press, 2008), p. 132.

³⁴⁰ Parliamentary Papers, *Workhouse Dietaries. Papers Relating to Workhouse Dietaries, 1867* (435), p. 12.

In most areas of the observed northern workhouse diets, Smith remarked on the lack of uniformity across the houses. This suggests that Guardians had changed dietaries with or without central authority sanction. In his 1866 report Smith confirmed that children between 9 and 16 years ate the same diet as women. Of the effect of the dietaries on the health of children, Smith identified 'too large a proportion, whose state of health is not equal to that of children in the general community'. He conceded that many of the children entered the workhouse in a physically distressed state, but 'further improvement is desirable and possible'. Smith was comparing the health of workhouse children with the general community, but the diet of the children of poor agricultural workers would generally be worse than that received in the workhouse.³⁴¹

A year later he published his proposal for the improvement of workhouse food. He advocated a better regime in the establishments including employment opportunities to stimulate appetite, an atmosphere of cleanliness, warmth and agreeable food. Alongside this holistic approach, he suggested improvements to cooking techniques, the speedy serving of food to maintain food heat, the use of pottery plates rather than wooden trenchers and pannikins, and the use of fresh vegetables. He was, however, opposed to the use of eggs. Regarding children, he emphasised that children needed a diet of sufficient quality and quantity to ensure good growth.³⁴² Also his dietary for the aged and infirm contained extra calories.

The new dietaries were not imposed on Guardians but were circulated to them with Smith's recommendations. Of the Shropshire Unions the only one to acknowledge

³⁴¹ Parliamentary Papers, *Dietaries for the Inmates of Workhouses, 1866* (3660), Report to the President of the Poor Law Board of Dr. Edward Smith, F.R.S., medical officer of the Poor Law Board, and Poor Law inspector, p. 19.

³⁴² Parliamentary Papers, *Workhouse Dietaries, Papers Relating to Workhouse Dietaries, 1867* (435), pp. 9 - 13.

Edward Smith's new dietaries and accompanying advice was Atcham. One cannot be sure that the other unions considered it, but they did not record it in their minutes. By the mid-1860s Guardians' minutes had become much less individual and more formulaic, with some minute books using a pro-forma style, and some union books became very finance-oriented. This may suggest that Guardians had an organised and functional way of doing business, excluding discussion of non-regular business. The effect of these changes of minuting style results in the historian losing access to Guardian discussions on items such as dietary changes.

In Atcham's response to the Edward Smith Dietaries plus advice, there appeared to be a divergence of opinion between Guardians and Officers of the Union. Perhaps perceiving Smith's advice as another attempt at central control, the Guardians wrote back to the Poor Law Board telling them that their present dietary arrangements were more than satisfactory and arguing that the Poor Law Board should not consider ordering Boards to adopt the new dietary.³⁴³

However, six weeks later Mr. Rowlandson, the Workhouse Master produced a report for the Guardians evidently containing proposals to adopt some of Smith's changes. The Guardians agreed to the Master and the Clerk working further on the proposals 'in the spirit of Dr. Smith' and to submit the proposals to the Board. This seems to be a case of officer enthusiasm pushing the Guardians into action.³⁴⁴ Three months later the new dietaries were signed by the Chairman, as Union policy.³⁴⁵

Progress was halted by the Workhouse Medical Officer who refused to countersign the new dietary tables because they did not go far enough, particularly respecting

³⁴³ SA: PL 1/2/2/6, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1864 – 1868, 21 May 1866, p. 63.

³⁴⁴ SA: PL 1/2/2/6, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1864 – 1868, 15 July 1867, p. 93.

³⁴⁵ SA: PL 1/2/2/6, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1864 – 1868, 21 October 1867, p. 102.

women who were breast-feeding. This is indicative of the heightened influence of Medical Officers in the 1860s compared to Mr. Valentine's vicissitudes in the 1840s at Ludlow.³⁴⁶

Less eligibility gradually declined as the principle underpinning workhouse life. In consequence in 1856 the Poor Law Board issued a circular designed to deal with children's diets. This stated that children between 9 and 16 should continue to be fed the same as women, and the dietaries of children under 9 should be submitted to the Board for approval. Two sample diets were described, one for children 2 to 5, and one for those aged 5 – 9. These dietaries offered more meat dinners, and more rice and suet puddings, with more butter and milk or milk and water offered.³⁴⁷

These dietaries are shown in Appendix 4.

The influence of medical officers was considerable in changing inmates' diets to better meet their health needs. In the Ludlow workhouse in 1841 Mr. Valentine worked tirelessly to introduce a special diet for sick paupers and was only defeated by the Guardians by manipulation of the Board of Guardians' procedures, as analysed below.³⁴⁸

In June of that year there was a bill of £34.7s.8d. for groceries ordered by Mr. Valentine. This was in addition to the usual grocery bills. It may be that Valentine ordered groceries as part of a dietary for the sick. At the same time he recommended to the Guardians that there be a new Sick Diet introduced for inmates who are ill. He was asked to prepare it in detail and his proposals were presented to

³⁴⁶ See Thesis, pp. 234 - 241.

³⁴⁷ Parliamentary Papers, *9th Report of the Poor Law Board*, p. 21.

³⁴⁸ J. Sumblar, 'Poor Relief in Ludlow 1836 – 1846', unpublished M. Res. dissertation, Keele University, 2008, pp. 98 – 99.

the Guardians' meeting of 7th July 1841 but were deferred.³⁴⁹ The sick Dietary was placed on the agenda for the next nine consecutive Guardians Meetings, but on every occasion it was deferred, ostensibly because of other pressing business. Clearly the Guardians did not wish to discuss it, presumably if Valentine's advice was to improve the diet in the infirmary they may have found it difficult to reject clear medical advice. They may also have felt that improving the infirmary diet would have implications for the general workhouse diet.³⁵⁰ After deferment on 24th November the sick dietary was never mentioned again. By that stage it was clear that the relationship between Valentine and the Guardians was at a very low ebb. Five years later in June 1846 the Ludlow Guardians realised the importance of diet to the health of workhouse inmates, they asked the workhouse medical officer to regulate the inmates' diet during the cholera epidemic.³⁵¹ The dietary returned to normal at the end of the epidemic.³⁵² Possibly the Guardians' different attitudes of 1841 and 1846 to the improvement of sick paupers' diet, was that at the earlier date Valentine was seeking a permanent structural improvement to the diet, whereas in 1846 the change was clearly temporary.

In 1854 the Ludlow workhouse medical officer, Mr. Meynott, became more than usually concerned about the children's debility and illness. He approached the Guardians with a programme designed to improve the children's health. He recommended to the Guardians that the quality of breakfast and lunch were improved with more milk and meat, more suet and fruit puddings and broth for dinner on meat days. He also argued for more outdoor exercise. This was agreed to, and a month

³⁴⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 7 July 1841, p. 34.

³⁵⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 10 November 1841, p. 78.

³⁵¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/5, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1843 – 1845, 25 June 1845, p. 18.

³⁵² SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, 4 November 1845, p. 41.

after its inception the medical officer reported an improvement in children's health, and the Guardians decided to continue the dietary for another month. Two months after that the medical officer reported that the workhouse was now free of child diarrhoea, and he wished the diet to continue. The Guardians decided to continue the diet.

In other Unions there were discussions about dietaries between Guardians and Medical Officers. In 1837 the Atcham Guardians offered gruel consisting of oatmeal and water, instead of milk. However six months later it reversed the decision on advice from the workhouse medical officer who felt the change was partly responsible for an increase in deaths during the period.³⁵³

After the 1830s Shropshire Unions generally only changed their dietaries to meet specific crises such as cholera, the epidemic of 1849 and the decline of potato quality in the 1840s. During the potato crisis Atcham replaced some potatoes with cabbage and beans. While not a Union, the Shrewsbury Incorporation suspended its dietary in 1849 and devolved dietary decision-making to the Medical Officer.³⁵⁴

Wellington and Madeley looked to retrench their dietaries during the 1840s.

Wellington was concerned that their dietary was attracting paupers and Madeley canvassed other Unions to seek cheaper dietaries that they could adopt.³⁵⁵ This was at a time when Madeley was spending heavily on out-relief.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ TNA: MH 12/9822, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, Clerk of the Atcham Union to the Poor Law Commission, 9 October 1837; MH 32/14, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, William Day to the Poor Law Commission, 7 May 1838.

³⁵⁴ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Laws in Shropshire', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1970, p. 263.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 264.

³⁵⁶ See Chapter 7, Shropshire Poor Law Unions and Out-Relief.

Moral Issues

The Consolidated Order of 1847 is explicit about classification of paupers. 'Boys above the age of seven years and under that of 15' should live together in a ward or separate building. The same was true of girls between the same ages. Children under 7 years of age 'may be placed in such of the wards appropriated to the female paupers as shall be deemed expedient, and the mothers of such paupers shall be permitted to have access to them at all reasonable times.'³⁵⁷ The regulations also stated that there should be no more than two paupers in one bed, with the exception of a mother and her children. Children were guaranteed at least 3 hours a day for education. There were strict rules about punishment. Corporal punishment of girls was not allowed, but it was allowed for boys provided it was administered by either the Workhouse Master or Schoolmaster. The 'flogging' had also to be administered with 'a rod or other instrument, such as may have been approved by the Guardians or the Visiting Committee'.³⁵⁸ To avoid punishment delivered in haste or in anger, two hours were to elapse between the offence and the punishment.³⁵⁹ Punishment arising from infringement of regulations, by either adults or children had to be recorded in a punishment book kept by the Workhouse Master. Flogging was not allowed to be administered to boys over 14 years of age.³⁶⁰ 'Also no child under 12 years of age shall be punished by confinement in a dark room or during the night.'³⁶¹

Regulations, though, are one thing and practice may have been different. In a devolved system such as the New Poor Law and with limited central inspections local

³⁵⁷ Parliamentary Papers, *The Poor Law Commission, Consolidated General Order 1847* – Articles 98, 99.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, Article 139.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, Article 140.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Article 142.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, Article 136.

practice was in the control of local people. At a national level the Poor Law Authorities issued circulars to hundreds of Poor Law Unions but those same circulars were acted on (or not) by local people who performed different roles within the separate Unions. A Union medical officer or a schoolmaster might well have priorities related to their responsibilities which sometimes clashed with the priorities of Workhouse Masters, and particularly Guardians who would not have had much day-to-day contact with paupers. The inmates would also have their own priorities which may not have accorded with those of the hierarchy. Even within the inmate body, there would be different priorities since acquiescent old people who saw the workhouses as the last resort, would have different priorities to healthy children who probably found the workhouse regime particularly irksome. In Shropshire Unions these competing priorities resulted in conflict with children resisting aspects of workhouse life, staff in opposition to Guardians and the edicts of the Poor Law Authorities, and staff in conflict with each other.

The Ludlow Guardians were serious about disciplinary rules and when Russell, a new Workhouse Master, punished children by 'cuffing them with his hand and other rough treatment' he was reprimanded and told not to offend again.³⁶² In 1849 two girls, Emma Corfield and Clara Arthur, were removed from the rest of the schoolchildren because of their dissolute and lewd behaviour.³⁶³ Adventurous and confident children who found the workhouse regime stultifying often absconded. The Workhouse authorities reacted to that with in-house punishment, and finally resorted to the magistrates, who often judged in favour of the child.

³⁶² SA: PL 9/2/1/5, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1843 – 1845, 18 December 1844, p. 196.

³⁶³ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Poor Law Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, 7 March 1849, p. 295.

The case of Edward Lewis is a good example of how determined some boys were to leave the workhouse and the Guardians attitude to that determination. In Ludlow Workhouse Edward Lewis aged 9 is first encountered in June 1843 when he absconded on a Friday morning and returned on the Saturday evening. On the next Monday he absconded again with two 'boys of weak intellect'.³⁶⁴ In November he was taken 'before the Board . . . for repeatedly absconding'.³⁶⁵ It is recorded as his fifth time of absconding and the Pauper Offence Book records, 'This was forgiven last Board day on promise of better behaviour'.³⁶⁶ He absconded again in November and on this occasion he was birched on his return. In March 1844 he absconded again, with his brother, and then the Master asked permission of the Board that 'the two Lewises may continue to sleep in the laundry of the young men's staircase, having had, last night, undoubted proof of their intention to commit felony on an extensive scale'.³⁶⁷ Edward Lewis ran away in October 1844 with a boy of good character. After absconding more times the Master described him as 'a most daring fellow'.³⁶⁸ After more abscondings in July 1845 he had his legs tied together and still escaped. In June 1846 he was given 14 days gaol for stealing workhouse clothes. He was 12 years old by that time, but had experience of life way beyond his years.³⁶⁹

There were occasions when magistrates supported inmates by handing down dubious judgements against Unions. In matters of punishment, there was often conflict between the Guardians and the Courts. On one occasion the Magistrate did

³⁶⁴ SA: PL 9/20/4/1, Ludlow Master's Report Book and Journal, 13th week, 24 June 1843.

³⁶⁵ SA: PL 9/20/4/1, Ludlow Master's Report Book and Journal, 9th week, 25 November 1843.

³⁶⁶ SA: PL 9/19/17/1, Ludlow Pauper Offence Book, June to November 1843, p.2, p.5.

³⁶⁷ SA: PL 9/20/4/1, Ludlow Master's Report Book and Journal, 16 March 1844, Case Nos. 7 – 11.

³⁶⁸ SA: PL 9/20/4/1, Ludlow Master's Report Book and Journal, 19 April 1845, Case Nos. 7 – 11.

³⁶⁹ Stealing Workhouse clothes was a charge often brought when in fact the Union was concerned about absconding. Since their original clothes were put in store a pauper who wished to abscond would have to go in workhouse clothes whether they wished to steal them or not. Absconders were often caught because they wore clothes with LUWH (Ludlow Union Workhouse) written on them.

not punish a child called Francis Hoskings from Ludlow Union for stealing Union clothes because he said he (the Magistrate) thought the clothes belonged to the parish. This was in 1840, four years after the formation of the Union and one year after the new workhouse was built, and so it is close to inconceivable that the magistrate did not know that the workhouse uniform belonged to the Poor Law Union. Also the Poor Law Amendment Act had significance for magistrates so he should have been very cognisant of the legislature. Hoskings was brought before the Magistrates again, and again discharged.³⁷⁰ The next time an absconder was sent to the Magistrate, the Ludlow Guardians appointed a solicitor to represent them.³⁷¹ Presumably they did this in order to present a credible legal challenge if the magistrate offered a judgement in favour of the inmate.

In 1841 Peter Cannadine, also a child from Ludlow Workhouse, absconded with Union clothes and the Magistrates decided that because he had a weak intellect and because of the severity of the usual punishment (which was three months in gaol) he was discharged with a caution.³⁷² The situation for adults was different regarding leaving the House. Workhouses were not prisons and adult inmates could discharge themselves if they gave a few hours' notice, and that enabled personal clothes to be returned to them. A few months later than Cannadine, Caroline Oakley was taken before the magistrates and was found guilty of the same offence but they declined to punish her because she was only 16 years old, she was an 'imbecile' and the minimum sentence was 3 months in gaol, which they thought was unjust.³⁷³ In summary these legal cases show that at times magistrates exercised their powers to

³⁷⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/3, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1839 – 1841, 12 February 1840, p. 31.

³⁷¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/3, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1839 – 1841, 19 February 1840, p. 33.

³⁷² SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 18 August 1841, p. 46.

³⁷³ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 5 January 1842, p. 99.

protect poor children from the disciplinary ethos of some poor law unions. They appeared to conclude that the charge of stealing of union clothes was merely a legal surrogate for absconding and that prison was unsuitable for children of low intelligence and already in the workhouse.

The cases described below show that Shropshire Unions used outside charitable agencies such as the Marine Society and Magdalene Asylum to aid individual inmates. There is one striking example of a pauper treated very well when it would have been easier for the Ludlow Guardians to deliver a standard punishment.³⁷⁴ In 1854 Ludlow Union had a pauper, Charlotte Green who was aged 14. The Guardians' minutes describe her as a thief, a prostitute and exceedingly depraved. The Union could have reacted in a punitive way by using their own punishment regulations in conjunction with the magistrates. Instead, however, they wrote to the Magdalene Asylum. The Magdalene Asylum replied to tell the Guardians that if she was sent there she would be reclaimed by the Sisters. The Guardians obtained the agreement of the mother and the workhouse master took Charlotte to London. Unfortunately Charlotte was diagnosed with a venereal disease which prevented her from staying in the Asylum. However the Magdalene authorities agreed to provide a nurse at 9s. a week until her disease was cured and then would admit her to the asylum.³⁷⁵

Suitable punishments for children were decided by the central Poor Law Authorities, and subsequently interpreted by the Union Guardians and Officers. These

³⁷⁴ The case of 14 year old Lewis is described in detail in Case Study 11, pp. 272 – 273.

³⁷⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1853 – 1857, 28 December 1854, p. 86. This was probably a Magdalene Sisters Asylum in London, but may have been run in a similar way to the notorious Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. The London Magdalene Asylum was active from 1758 – 1966. www.stgite.org.uk. (The St. George-in-the-East Church website.) The Guardians may have acted in what they thought was the girl's best interest.

punishments were formalised in order to protect children in an environment in which adults wielded considerable power in the local workhouse. It was the task of the Guardians to ensure that the punishments administered were consistent with the Orders of the central Authorities. In the few instances where workhouse staff administered unreasonable punishments the various Boards of Guardians dealt with the incidents firmly. In 1852 the Newport Workhouse Visiting Committee found that two children had been beaten and confined in the Dead House at Gnosall by the Master and Mistress.³⁷⁶ The Guardians reported the matter to the Poor Law Board.³⁷⁷ Presumably connected with that, three months later the Master and Mistress, Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins resigned.³⁷⁸ At Atcham Mrs. Owens the Matron had beaten a child. The Guardians warned her not to do it again or they might write to the Poor Law Commission, which may have provoked dismissal.³⁷⁹

In schools located in the workhouse (as opposed to District Schools) where the schoolmaster and mistress were subordinate to the workhouse master tension could exist between teachers and the workhouse master over control of children's time and tasks to be done. Industrial Training, designed to give pauper children marketable skills could be subverted by requiring children to perform repetitive household tasks.³⁸⁰ In 1852 Jelinger Symons, an inspector of schools, recommended to the Ludlow Guardians that they employ an industrial trainer for the boys but this was rejected by the Guardians because the boys were needed to pump water.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ The Dead House was a room in the Workhouse in which bodies were put before burial.

³⁷⁷ SA: PL 11/5, Newport Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1852, 14 September 1852, p. 169.

³⁷⁸ SA: PL 11/5, Newport Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1852, 7 December 1852, p. 175.

³⁷⁹ SA: PL 1/2/2/2, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1840 – 1845, 3 January 1842, p. 71.

³⁸⁰ A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834 – 1929* (Methuen, 1983), pp. 203 – 204.

³⁸¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 -1853, 1 September 1852, p. 241.

In 1848 the Ludlow Guardians caused a man to be apprehended for the neglect and desertion of his child, which resulted in the child becoming chargeable to the Union. The father received one month's gaol with hard labour.³⁸² This is an example of a Shropshire Union stepping outside of its original role of relieving paupers, though it is impossible to tell whether the Union was motivated more by the child's chargeability or concerns about child protection. What is not included in Shropshire Poor Law Records is mention of the sexual abuse of children in the various institutions. However, writing in the context of the twenty-first century Bernard Gallagher writes that 'It is likely that sexual abuse has occurred in most, if not all, types of institution for children'.³⁸³ Jackson demonstrates the sexual abuse of children was widespread in Victorian England, though described by euphemisms, such as 'moral corruption', 'immorality', 'tampering', 'ruining' and 'outrage'. She writes that Victorians understood the concept of child sexual abuse even if they used other names for it. However, the statutory age of consent for girls was only raised from 12 to 13 in 1875, and to 16 in 1885.³⁸⁴

When Victorians considered the subject of child sexual abuse it was almost invariably involving girls. Coveney and Cunningham describe a change in the conceptualising of children at the end of the eighteenth century from a notion of original sin, with its corollary of inherent guilt, towards a concept of children as innately virtuous, promoted by Wordsworth and the Romantics.³⁸⁵ Simultaneously, with the concept of

³⁸² SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1846 – 1848, 19 April 1848, p. 218.

³⁸³ B. Gallagher, 'The extent and nature of known cases of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse', *British Journal of Social Work* (2000) 30, 795 – 817, p. 796.

³⁸⁴ L. A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

³⁸⁵ P. Coveney, *The image of childhood. The individual and society: a study of the theme in English literature* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 42 – 44 and 68 – 90; H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London, Longman, 1995), pp. 41 – 78.

child virtue went increasing concern about juvenile delinquency.³⁸⁶ With girls this dichotomy produced a confusion in the status of the abused. On the one hand an abused girl was seen as a victim, but on the other hand she was perceived as someone who had lost innocence, and become a threat to sexual orderliness.³⁸⁷ Jackson argues that this caused the ambivalence towards sexual abuse in the nineteenth century. She does not include abuse in Poor Law Workhouses within her book, because there is no evidence to show that it occurred. Crompton mentions physical abuse but not sexual abuse.³⁸⁸ Charles Shaw in his autobiography writes about his experience in a boys' only dormitory but only records instances of boy on boy intimidation and bullying.³⁸⁹

Even though there appears to be no available evidence of sexual abuse in Workhouses, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there is clear evidence of abuse in institutions containing children. If we are also to accept the view of Gallagher then sexual abuse was very likely in some if not all workhouses, and was either not detected, or concealed, or considered normal. Jackson does, however, include numerous examples of sexual abuse in the home and in the workplace. Shani D'Cruze describes how vulnerable young girls in domestic service were susceptible to abuse by employers.³⁹⁰ The home and the workplace were environments based on hierarchies with young girls subordinate to everybody. It seems unlikely that abuse in Victorian society was so prevalent but not present in workhouses.

³⁸⁶ L. A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge, 2000), p. 6.

³⁸⁷ H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare. England 1872 – 1989* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1 – 42.

³⁸⁸ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997).

³⁸⁹ C. Shaw, *When I was a child* (Caliban, 1867).

³⁹⁰ S. D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), pp. 88 - 94.

In summary, Shropshire Guardians took a serious approach to the maintenance of moral and behavioural standards in the workhouse and enforced good behaviour from the staff. Sometimes the Guardians' strict punishments were not supported by local magistrates.

Summary

The provision of workhouses was a keynote policy of the Whig Government elected in 1832. During the political discussions resulting in the passing of the Act, the plight of and prospects for poor children was not uppermost in the concerns of Parliamentarians. However, during the rapid population increase of the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century the number of children as a proportion of the country's population increased considerably. This increase in child numbers fed through to the Poor Law Statistics. In Shropshire in 1841, 57% of the county's workhouse inmates were children and these numbers of workhouse children were reflected throughout the county's workhouses. Whatever the priorities of the 1834 legislators, the Shropshire Union Guardians had to confront the difficulties of workhouses more than half full of children.

With the incomplete nature of evidence, it is impossible to generalise about the treatment of children in all Shropshire workhouses. However, six Shropshire Unions and one Staffordshire Union with Shropshire parishes sent children to Quatt District School, and therefore decided to pay for separate provision for their children. Also Newport and Wellington Unions arranged separate children's provision. Ludlow and Atcham were at the forefront of the recording of their treatment of child inmates, but

evidence about childhood experiences in Shropshire workhouses was gathered from all of the county's Unions.

Over half of the county's Unions realised that children needed separate provision and arranged for that. Nationally Workhouse Dietaries were better than the diets eaten by independent families, and some Shropshire Unions' improved the Poor Law Commission authorised diets. Those positive changes were often initiated by Medical Officers. Shropshire Unions used outside agencies to meet the needs of children where appropriate and there is more evidence of that in the chapter on Health. Children are very vulnerable in a society without rules, and Shropshire Unions were rule-based organisations where the treatment of children was reasonably fair and predictable.

Shropshire had a long history of workhouse provision, with some like Atcham built in the latter half of the eighteenth century as Houses of Industry, and some like Ludlow built soon after 1834. Other Unions, including Wellington and Madeley, made use of inherited poor/workhouses and only built anew after 1870. Throughout the county there was sufficient space in the houses to avoid overcrowding except for the period of industrial recession in the early 1840s. Many of the county's workhouses were much larger than necessary and were built to house unrealistically large numbers of inmates.

Though Shropshire Workhouses were generally larger than the number of inmates warranted, the allocation of space was inflexible because of the design and the building materials used, resulting in sometimes redundant space in one part of the house, and overcrowding elsewhere. Some Unions, notably Newport, Bridgnorth and Wellington were imaginative in dealing with their large child population, and

housed children in buildings separate from the other inmates. That had advantages for children, because in a separate building with its own management children could possibly avoid the disciplinary ethos of a workhouse based on less eligibility. Also a separate building for children allowed activities such as education to have prominence in allocation of time and resources. At their children's house in Ercall Magna the Wellington Union developed a school based around agricultural training and Bridgnorth founded a District School at Quatt, which had a roll of 190 pupils in 1871, recruited from six Unions. While the Quatt School and Ercall Magna's central purpose was education it also provided permanent accommodation for the children. There is little evidence of the domestic regime at Quatt or Ercall Magna but both schools offered opportunities to avoid the disciplinary regimes of all-purpose workhouses. They also offered the possibility of children being treated like children and not merely inmates. There is evidence that some county Boards of Guardians succeeded in making their workhouses family friendly. The Clun/Bishops Castle workhouse had plans to build an infirmary but instead built a dining room to enable families to eat together. William Day, who persuaded Clun to build a dining room, was Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, so an influential figure in Shropshire, and he may have exhorted other Unions to do the same. As a further example of inmate-friendly design Ludlow provided accommodation for married couples as early as 1836.

Nationally the diets for all workhouse inmates were better in content than the diet of independent agricultural workers, whose families ate chiefly bread and potatoes. Inmates' diets included meat (Dietary 1 contained meat 3 days a week, with cheese on the other 4 days), and they consisted of a regular 3 meals a day throughout the year and was allocated fairly, according to regulations. This was important for

children because in independent labourers' families the lion's share may have been given to the breadwinner(s). Some Shropshire Unions improved the recommended diets' calorific value.

Children over 9 received adult women's portions. The diets of children under 9 were unregulated but after 1856 there were official dietaries for children under 9. These included meat on 4 days a week, and milk every day. None of the dietaries for children or adults mention vegetables or fruit except for potatoes. If children did not eat vegetables or fruit that would have resulted in health problems. The workhouse schools at Quatt and in the Wellington Union grew vegetables which were consumed by child inmates.

Special meals, including Roast Beef, were prohibited by the Poor Law Commission but Ludlow Union allowed others to provide them, and then the Guardians themselves subscribed to special meals. This is evidence of the Ludlow Unions remaining true to Old Poor Law customs despite the orders of the Poor Law Commission. Adulteration of institutional food was a recurring problem but Shropshire Unions were active in dealing with unsatisfactory suppliers. Union medical officers in the County began to exercise more influence over diet and its relationship to illness both for children and adults.

Chapter 4

Education in Shropshire Workhouses

Introduction

The education of pauper children strikes at the heart of the purpose of the workhouse. Was the workhouse system designed to be punitive or rehabilitating at its inception, and did it remain so as it was modified by the various Boards of Guardians? If the workhouse was essentially punitive and based entirely on less eligibility then providing education to paupers was to undermine the system. But if one of the purposes of the workhouse was to break the continuation of hereditary pauperism then education of pauper children was a vital tool for achieving that. This chapter will examine how the Shropshire Poor Law Union educated the children in its care.

Seeking examples from the historiography of Poor Law Education one searches almost in vain, but there are four writers who treat the subject with more than a passing reference. These four are Digby, Livingstone, Duke and Crompton.³⁹¹ Ann Digby begins her analysis of Norfolk Poor Law Union schools with an unequivocal statement of how good they were.³⁹² Norfolk was fortunate in having James Kay who was the Poor Law Inspector from 1835 to 1838.³⁹³ Improved education was

³⁹¹ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993; Francis Duke, 'Pauper Education', in Derek Fraser (ed), *The Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan 1976); F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997).

³⁹² A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 180.

³⁹³ James Kay, who was later knighted and became Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, was a key figure in mid-nineteenth century education policy. In 1835 he was appointed as Poor Law Commissioner in Norfolk and Suffolk and in 1839 he was appointed secretary of the Privy Council Committee of Council on Education which administered Government grants for public education. In 1840, with E. Carleton

seen by many as a vehicle for social stability, particularly in the social and economic turmoil of the early nineteenth century. Kay helped the Norfolk workhouses to develop education using three pedagogical strategies - intellectual, moral and industrial.

Farmers, who formed the majority on rural Union Boards, were content with moral and industrial but sceptical of the value of intellectual education since it might induce social mobility, and teaching English geography was a concern since Norfolk farmers were worried about outward emigration affecting their summertime pool of labour.³⁹⁴

In 1846 there was an attempt to improve the training and qualification of teachers with the Committee of Council on Education initiating an inspectorate for workhouse schools, and funding Kneller Hall as a workhouse teacher training college and grants for teachers' salaries based on performance. The Committee of Council on Education's responsibility for workhouse schools continued until 1863, when responsibility was changed to the Poor Law Board, and did not return to the Board of Education until 1904.

Worcestershire provides another opportunity to assess the nature and quality of workhouse education. Crompton devotes a chapter of his book on *Workhouse Children* to education provided by Worcestershire Poor Law Unions.³⁹⁵ Crompton describes Worcestershire Boards of Guardians as lacking in enthusiasm for providing education for their charges, with the exception of Kidderminster Union which was active in promoting education, though Crompton suggests this was a social control measure in view of Kidderminster's 'largest, most threatening urban population' and

Tufnell he founded Battersea College for the training of teachers of pauper children. He was also a significant contributor to the foundation of Kneller Hall teacher training centre.

³⁹⁴ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 183.

³⁹⁵ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997), pp. 146 - 195.

that education was a method for occupying children's time.³⁹⁶ Crompton recognises that educational provision for paupers contradicted the principle of less eligibility.

At Kidderminster the catechism was a central part of the paupers' education, and the chaplain made the decisions about the purchase of books. There was concern within the Central Authorities that farmers might not choose to spend ratepayers' money on an education which they had not had themselves. Martley Union refused to teach writing until the Poor Law Commission threatened legal action. That Union also had no teacher for almost a year in the mid-1840s.

Jelinger Symons, an Inspector of workhouse schools, sought to persuade Worcestershire Unions of the virtues of collaboration on forming a district school but was unsuccessful.³⁹⁷

Low salaries inhibited the appointment of trained teachers. Another Worcestershire problem was lack of suitable educational accommodation and Inspectors often complained about small classrooms. Crompton writes that workhouse education improved, largely by the system of school inspection linked to government grants. He contrasts the positive attitude to education of urban Guardians with the negative attitudes of those from rural Worcestershire.³⁹⁸

Many of the Shropshire Unions' Guardians were zealous, committed men content to give service to the public for a variety of reasons. Of these there were three Union Chairmen, who, in their different ways were significant people in the implementation

³⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 148.

³⁹⁷ Jelinger Symons was appointed as an Inspector of Poor Law Education responsible for Wales and the West of England in February 1848, and remained an Inspector until his death in 1860. His educational philosophy was based on pupil self-discipline combined with the virtues of kindness and obedience, within a religious framework. He thought there was a strong connection between pauperism and crime and he sought to break that connection. He was an advocate of the District School system. For a fuller description of Jelinger Symonds as an educator see Chapter Four of Livingstone.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 154.

of the New Poor Law. One of them, Baldwyn Leighton of Atcham was a community broker, facilitating the building of hospitals and asylums in the county. Another was William Wolryche Whitmore, Chairman of Bridgnorth Guardians who was Member of Parliament for Bridgnorth with a county seat at Dudmaston Hall and his achievements lay with pauper education.³⁹⁹ The third was Robert Slaney, Chairman of Ellesmere Union for only four years, but he was Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury and Chairman of the Select Committee on Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales. He found the responsibilities of running a Poor Law Union 'irksome', and spent a great deal of time in London. That left much decision-making at Ellesmere in the hands of former Guardians, who did not share his knowledge or attitudes.

These three men and the Unions they led are the subject of Jane Livingstone's Ph. D. Thesis.⁴⁰⁰ She shows the interaction between 'structure, policy and personality' in the development of pauper education, structure in the creation of workhouses, policy in the decision to develop education, the complex relationships between central authorities and the Poor Law Unions, and the personal contributions of men like James Kay, William Wolryche Whitmore, Baldwyn Leighton and Jelinger Symons who in their different ways impacted on pauper education.

Duke has written a useful account of New Poor Law education.⁴⁰¹ He emphasises that workhouse schools pioneered educational development and offered a lead to elementary schools. Poor Law schools achieved much, despite their close

³⁹⁹ L. Smith, 'William Wolryche Whitmore of Bridgnorth and his Solution to Hereditary Pauperism', *Transaction Wrekin Local Studies Forum*, 2006.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993.

⁴⁰¹ F. Duke, 'Pauper Education' in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976).

connection to the workhouse. Their contribution to industrial training was particularly useful to child inmates, in their desire not to become adult inmates.

After one considers the work of Digby, Crompton, Duke and Livingstone there is less written about the education provided by the Poor Law Unions. There is, though, much written about Victorian Education in general and education of the Victorian working-class. Even those books that address the education of poor children ignore the education of the very poor, despite Union education existing because of legislation and educating a significant number of children and in effect also being compulsory, pre-dating legislation in the 1870s and 1880s.

Other writers have analysed the nature and quality of education for the poor. The Silvers examined two London elementary schools which opened in the 1820s and were built with voluntary funds, raised largely by the Church of England.⁴⁰² The Kennington schools were built in an attempt to meet the needs of an increasing population, particularly so in South London and followed the formation in 1811 of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church and the consecration of St. Mark's Church, Kennington.

The establishment of such schools was controversial with many viewing the education of the poor with suspicion. As Gardner pointed out, some charity schools of this period provided a limited curriculum encompassed by a moral, religious framework, based on strict obedience, which could be considered as much social control as education.⁴⁰³ At the time the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge was content to oversee limited provision of education of the poor. The provision of Sunday schools for the education of the weekly working poor was viewed

⁴⁰² P. and H. Silver, *The Education of the Poor* (Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1974).

⁴⁰³ P. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England* (Croom Helm, 1984), p. 161.

as undermining the authority of the church. The Kennington Schools were founded at a time of social and industrial change and the birth of new communities in the cities and large towns without the church or rural support networks.

The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England describes those schools that supplied children with an education 'entirely supported by the payments of scholars, and in which there was no element of administrative authority independent of the teacher and promoter'. These private schools were subdivided into a tripartite system. The 'superior' schools catered for the children of gentlemen and professional men. The 'middling day schools' catered for the children of tradespersons with a few mechanics of a superior class. The 1851 Education Census described the third category as 'inferior schools', often subdivided into dame schools and common day schools, though the nomenclature was often more various and complex. Gardner's book describes the 'inferior' schools and does note the existence of workhouse schools as a sub-species of publicly funded education. He writes that the difference between dame and common day schools varied from time to time and was not always susceptible to conceptual analysis. The Select Committee on the Education of the Poorer Classes of 1837 saw no need to separate the two classes of school.⁴⁰⁴

There is a contrast between the views of educational experts and working-class parents regarding Dame Schools and other private schools aimed at a working-class clientele. Grigg writes that 'private adventure schools' were supported by the Welsh working-class in preference to schools with a religious or state-funded bias.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ P. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England* (Croom Helm, 1984), p. 16.

⁴⁰⁵ G. R. Grigg, "Nurseries of ignorance? Private adventure and dame schools for the working classes in nineteenth-century Wales", *History of Education*, May 2005, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 243.

It was the curricular demands and preferences of parents which differentiated the schools. Dame schools came to be viewed as teaching reading with some instruction in sewing and knitting, with Day Schools offering writing and arithmetic, though the Children's Employment Commission thought they taught writing and arithmetic badly. Both the London Statistical Society and the 1837 Select Committee regarded Day Schools as little better than Dame Schools. In Birmingham the cost of the respective schools differentiated them, with Dame Schools typically charging 3½d. a week for reading, sewing and knitting, with Common Day Schools charging 7d. a week for a broader curriculum including arithmetic and writing.⁴⁰⁶

Gardner identifies working class private schools as offering what parents required, as opposed to what the middle-class offered through the vehicle of Infant Schools. He argues that the middle class educational establishment saw working-class education as a means of establishing social order, through discipline and indoctrination. In contrast the working class private schools offered a semi-parental care alongside individual tuition with little religious teaching. This appeared to resonate with working class parents.

Some other writers take a more overarching view of the value-systems of elementary education, the New Poor Law and pauper education. One such is Eric Sigsworth who has gathered a range of writers to engage in a search for Victorian Values, and in the process they contrast the values of thrift, hard work and family with concepts of pauperism and the role of the workhouse and hint at the issue of education as social control.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ G. R. Grigg, "Nurseries of ignorance"? Private adventure and dame schools for the working classes in nineteenth-century Wales', *History of Education*, May 2005, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 243 – 262.

⁴⁰⁷ E. Sigsworth (ed.), *In search of Victorian Values* (Manchester University Press, 1988).

Some other writers do more than hint at the issue of social control as the reason for educating the working class and paupers. Phillip McCann edited a collection of articles with the theme of socialisation in popular education.⁴⁰⁸ The articles concentrate on the interaction between the attitudes and requirement of a 'ruling class' dispensing education and a working class receiving that education. The book challenges the view that education is merely a value-free transmission of the prevailing culture, based around a need to 'guide, restrain and control' society's members, particularly its younger ones. Connected with this is the question of who does the guiding, restraining and controlling. Goldstrom's chapter from McCann shows the nature of books produced for schools in the mid-nineteenth century. The readers for children embodied 'correct moral and religious tenets'.⁴⁰⁹ The link between education, social control, and the concern about working class behaviour and crime is also examined by Johnson.⁴¹⁰ The Prison Inspectorate saw moral and religious education as an antidote to the crime wave attributed to the children of the urban poor, and Johnson juxtaposed the New Poor Law deterrence with Kay Shuttleworth's more positive workhouse and District Schools. Factory Inspectors also argued for industrial schools.

Goldstrom adds some depth and detail to the debate about social control in elementary education by examining the teachers' and pupils' books that were made available to nineteenth century schools under the control of the church organisations, Anglican, non-denominational, Catholic, Congregational and Wesleyan.⁴¹¹ His book excludes workhouse schools though some of the books described were used in

⁴⁰⁸ P. McCann, *Popular Education and Socialisation in the Nineteenth Century* (Methuen, 1977).

⁴⁰⁹ J. M. Goldstrom, *The Social Content of Education 1808 – 1870* (Irish University Press, 1972), p. 94.

⁴¹⁰ R. Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England,' *Past and Present*, Vol. 49 (1970), pp. 96 -119.

⁴¹¹ J. M. Goldstrom, *The Social Content of Education 1808 – 1870* (Irish University Press, 1972).

Shropshire Union schools. In particular, Goldstrom analyses the books as a vehicle for social control. In National Society schools the first books were suggested by Andrew Bell and designed to be used in a monitorial system. These books were very religious in content, with adaptations of Bible stories and the Bible's meaning. In terms of the social structure implied in the texts they assume a static society with the squire at its zenith and the poor at the bottom, separated into respectable and those lacking virtue. Non-conformist attitudes to education were different and had interest in educating children to be honest and responsible but not to revere the Anglican hierarchy.

Brian Simon writes from a Marxist perspective that the philosophical radicals apart from advocating better quality middle-class education also advanced the idea of universal education.⁴¹² They thought that a utilitarian view of society would not be viable if there was a dislocation between the governed and the governors. Therefore the franchise had to be extended to prevent the aristocracy and the landed interest pursuing their own governing agenda. The response of the aristocracy was that the mass of the people were incapable of making considered decisions. Mill's response was that the people needed to be educated wisely to use the extended franchise. Whitbread (the leader of the Whigs) presented a Bill in 1807 to establish parish schools, which provoked strong Tory opposition and a fear that the working class would 'despise their lot in life', and would be able to read seditious pamphlets.⁴¹³

In Simon's opinion Whitbread's view 'underlies the changing attitude of the middle class to working class education'.⁴¹⁴ Mill, Wakefield and Francis Place strove for the goal of an enlightened but submissive working class by helping to form the

⁴¹² B. Simon, *Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780 – 1870* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1964).

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 132.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 128.

Lancasterian Society (later the British and Foreign Schools Society). Later in the century there was a common view that 'an ignorant populace was a dangerous populace', leading to a school curriculum based on discipline, literacy and religious instruction.

As a contra-argument Thompson questions whether the Victorian working class were 'perpetually on the receiving end of outside forces'.⁴¹⁵ He writes that the religious schools prior to 1870 were shunned by many of the poorest families (not including the Poor Law Union clients) and by better paid workers, and that these groups preferred those schools that did not preach or moralise. He also brings in Goldstrom to support his argument that the religious community failed in its goal of social control. Also he argues that social transformation also occurred as the working class became consumers, were not always on the receiving end, and emulated the attitudes and aspirations of the middle class.⁴¹⁶

An issue for schools of all types was recruiting quality teachers. James Kay turned his attention to pauper education in the late 1830s and it was partly through his efforts that Kneller Hall was founded in 1848, but it only existed for 7 years. He recognised that workhouse teachers in the early years after 1834 were unlikely to reverse pauper ignorance. Kneller Hall was an attempt to redress that by training male teachers to work in District Schools, created by the amalgamation of individual workhouse schools. District Schools failed to emerge in sufficient numbers to make the Kneller Hall project a success. As a result the Kneller Hall graduates only obtained posts in workhouse schools with poor working conditions, and low salaries, and in

⁴¹⁵ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, May 1981, p. 189

⁴¹⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, May 1981, pp. 189 – 208.

consequence, low esteem.⁴¹⁷ Bischof describes Kneller Hall (funded publicly) as Battersea's (funded privately) 'forgotten twin'.⁴¹⁸ Gladstone thought Kneller Hall should be used to train teachers for elementary schools, and 'King and Church' Tories thought it should not exist at all because it was not purely Anglican and was state-run, and right wing opinion wrote of 'infidel schoolmasters' promulgating secular and democratic ideas.⁴¹⁹ Despite this, the Committee of Council on Education approved generous salaries for lecturers, and the ethos of the College was to develop the personal qualities of students rather than to teach pedagogy. Students learnt factual knowledge about Christianity but were 'light on religious instruction', even though the headmaster was Frederick Temple, an Anglican priest who later became archbishop of Canterbury.⁴²⁰

Framing the Question

The introduction reveals a partial lack of descriptions and qualitative analysis of the quality of workhouse education. There is also no evidence to show the quality of learning that workhouse pupils achieved since there is no pupils' work available. In Shropshire there is evidence (provided by Henry Garland) that Quatt School alumni found work in a variety of valuable occupations after leaving the school, so that provides some assurance relating to Quatt that education there at least helped children achieve employment.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ C. Bischof, 'Masculinity, Social Mobility, and the Plan to End Pauperism in mid-Victorian England,' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 46 No. 4 (2013), pp. 1039 – 1059.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 1043.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 1044.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 1047.

⁴²¹ Parliamentary Papers, 1854 – 1855, Jelinger Symons, *General Report, Committee of Council on Education*, (1854 – XLII.767) pp 160 – 161.

That is no mean achievement since those children would have been orphans, desertees or members of pauper families, so would have been heavily disadvantaged as children. Did that quality of education only exist at Quatt or were other Union workhouses equally as good? Shropshire workhouse schools were periodically inspected so there is evidence to partially answer that question. Those opinion-formers like Chadwick viewed the workhouse as a punitive institution that was designed to segregate the destitute and those perceived as immoral such as mothers with illegitimate children, from the merely very poor who chose to survive outside. How would a workhouse school prosper in such a negative environment? Was the existence of good workhouse schools in Shropshire a triumph of local will, or the will of the Committee of Council on Education's James Kay and his inspectors over government indifference and educational vacillation, or both? How capable were the teachers in Shropshire workhouse schools, what training had they, and did they have a well-paid job with good conditions of service? What was taught to children was also significant, therefore how was the curriculum structured, was it used for social or religious control and was it academic or practical or both? Expanding the concept of social control did boys and girls have the same educational experiences?

Answers to these questions are structured in five sections. Initially, since most pauper families received out-relief it is important to establish whether those pauper children received education, and of what quality. Secondly, the quality of teaching staff would have been a vital factor in workhouse children's education, so it is important to establish the quality of staff employed to teach in Shropshire workhouses. Thirdly and fourthly, complementing the debate on the quality of teaching staff, is an analysis of Shropshire workhouse schools, including the school at Quatt, both before 1846, when the Education Inspectorate was formed and from 1846

until the 1860s when the influence of the Inspectorate was greatest. Finally, the impact of social control in Shropshire workhouse education is analysed.

Outdoor Pauper Education

While the education of the workhouse child was required by the Central Authorities and inspected as to its quality, this affected only a minority of pauper children since most of them were maintained by out-relief, and no provision was made for the education of those children until permissive legislation in 1855. The Webbs wrote, 'so complete was the preoccupation of the Poor Law Commissioners with the suppression of the primary evil of Outdoor Relief to the able-bodied; so deep-rooted was the esoteric hostility of the Poor Law Commissioners and the Poor Law Inspectors alike, to the continuance of any class maintained on Outdoor Relief; and so indisposed were Poor Law Guardians to encourage any idea that might lead to increased expense, that, for a whole generation, the annals, with regard to children on Outdoor Relief, are blank'.⁴²² Certainly the Shropshire Unions documented little of the education of outdoor pauper children.

In England and Wales the numbers of outdoor maintained child paupers was very large and in January 1849 they numbered 328,090, though the number declined a little after 1870.⁴²³ Therefore large numbers of children from very poor families had no realistic access to education, when compared to their wealthier peers and those children in the workhouse. Those poor families who remained outside the

⁴²² S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part II, The Last Hundred Years* (Private Subscription, 1929), p. 249.

⁴²³ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, p. 244.

workhouse disadvantaged their child educationally, inevitably but inadvertently. The original intention of the 1834 legislators was that outdoor relief would be abolished as far as possible, and therefore there would be no outdoor pauper children to be educated, with a clear demarcation line between paupers in the workhouse and the independent poor. Out-relief continued after 1834 because it was cheaper for Unions to support families in that manner, and temporary out-door relief often alleviated seasonal unemployment or industrial recessions better than the workhouse.⁴²⁴

The Central Authorities also allowed out-relief to continue by allowing sickness as a justification for receiving it.⁴²⁵ Digby shows that the percentage of adult males receiving out relief was never below 64% of the total adult male pauper population.⁴²⁶ Presumably concerned at the economic problem of financing outdoor pauper education, orders were issued in 1844 and 1847 explicitly instructing Guardians not to pay for outdoor education.⁴²⁷

Livingstone, however, records examples of Central Authorities suggesting that workhouse schools be open to outdoor pauper children, but it never became a firm policy. In 1847 the Poor Law Board wrote to Ludlow Union expressly forbidding the education of outdoor pupils.⁴²⁸ Indeed, the only correspondence between the Committee of Council on Education and the Poor Law Board concerning outdoor

⁴²⁴ L. H. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers, the English poor laws and the people, 1700 – 1948* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 177 – 190.

⁴²⁵ Michael Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law', *Economic History Review*, XIX, 1966, p. 611; Anne Digby, 'The Labour Market and the Continuity of Social Policy after 1834: The Case of the Eastern Counties', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, Vol. XXVIII (1975), p. 73.

⁴²⁶ Anne Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976), p. 162.

⁴²⁷ *Poor Law Commission Circular No. 31 1844* PRO MH 10/11, *Poor Law Board Circulars Nos. 18 and 19 Sept. and Oct. 1848*.

⁴²⁸ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, p. 247 - 248

pauper education was a letter from School Inspector Brown about the Glossop Union, in which he suggested admitting outdoor paupers to make the workhouse school viable.⁴²⁹ School Inspector Symons was however in favour of the policy of educating outdoor pauper children.⁴³⁰

Livingstone notes that the situation for these children was not so dire because 34% received education paid for by relatives and 15% by 'other parties' and 19% were at work.⁴³¹ Ragged schools also educated many children who fell between Poor Law education and elementary schools. Even with this provision there were still sizeable numbers of outdoor pauper children uneducated.

There were some midland and northern Unions, notably Manchester, which chose to educate outdoor children and were not prevented from doing so by the Central Authorities. Perhaps that was because the Poor Law Board's writ did not run strongly in the north of England.⁴³² The Poor Law Board recognised that Quatt School, before attaining district status, admitted outdoor children and wrote in a circular that this was designed to provide the children with industrial training. However when Quatt became a District School the Poor Law Board disallowed the practice.⁴³³

In 1855 the Education of Poor People Act was passed which permitted (but did not compel) Guardians to provide for the education of outdoor paupers. The permissive nature of the Act prevented it from solving the problem of outdoor children's

⁴²⁹ Parliamentary Papers, *Education of Pauper Children, Copy of Communications which have taken place between the President of the Privy Council and the President of the Poor Law Board, relative to the education of children receiving out-door relief. 1845 – 1855 (152) XLI.*

⁴³⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1854 XLII, *Schools Inspector Symons, General Report 1854*, p. 147.

⁴³¹ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993), p. 249.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, pp. 250 – 251.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p 252.

education. The Newcastle Commission reported that in 1859, 262,204 were recorded as children of outdoor paupers yet only 6,537 were recorded as being educated by Union funds and the Commission recommended that 'Outdoor children should be educated out of the rates'.⁴³⁴ The Select Committee on Destitute Children, reporting in 1861 said approximately the same, and also said that outdoor relief should only be given if the eligible children in the family were sent to school.⁴³⁵ However the Poor Law Board and its Inspectors continued to conflate less eligibility and education and stated that it was not appropriate to educate outdoor paupers on the rates and not the children of independent labourers.⁴³⁶ Despite this, Unions in 1870 paid education fees for 22,033 outdoor children, a large increase on 1861, which had been 6,863.⁴³⁷ Digby writes that Norfolk Guardians paid for 19% of outdoor pauper children to be educated in Norfolk schools in 1869.⁴³⁸ Shropshire Unions' responses to Denison's Act was 'chiefly ineffectual', though there is evidence in Madeley Union records of many school payments for out-relief children.⁴³⁹

Recruitment and Retention within Workhouse Schools

Quality of teaching and quality of teachers are significant factors in the quality of schools. During the years 1834 – 1870 local elementary schools were recruiting teachers and so workhouse schools faced competition in recruiting good quality

⁴³⁴ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of Popular Education in England 1861*, Vol. 1, (2794 – 1), pp. 380 – 385 (Newcastle Report).

⁴³⁵ Parliamentary Papers 1861 VII, *The Select Committee on the Education of Destitute Children*, p. 397.

⁴³⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1864 IX, May 31, *Report from The Select Committee on Poor Relief*.

⁴³⁷ Parliamentary Papers 1870 LVIII.65, No. 123, *Return of Children on Outdoor Relief*, p. 5.

⁴³⁸ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge Kegan Paul 1978), p. 194.

⁴³⁹ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, pp. 273 – 274.

teachers and the church societies were prepared to pay higher salaries than Poor Law Unions.

When it came to recruiting teachers the National Society and the British and Foreign Schools Society may have been unable to direct large sums of money into education, but they were committed to the concept of elementary education and did not view it as a dubious use of money, in contrast to some Shropshire Poor Law Unions. The composition of most rural Shropshire Union Boards of Guardians was dominated by farmers. In Atcham Union in 1838 73% of Guardians were farmers and farmers made up between 60% and 70% of the Board of Guardians up to 1857. This was also true of Ellesmere and Ludlow, and even in semi-industrial Madeley 50% of Guardians were farmers.⁴⁴⁰

Farmer Guardians were less likely than other categories of Guardians to value education. This was particularly true of Ellesmere where Slaney's liberal and progressive views were at odds with fellow Guardians.⁴⁴¹ Farmers often took the view that in rural areas education was of limited value to a farm labourer, and rebelled against the idea of labourers being educated better than themselves, and were also unwilling to spend ratepayers' money on what they perceived as expensive luxuries. *The Quarterly Review* of 1861 contained an article on Guardians at Quatt School wishing to enlarge the school and being defeated by the farmers on Union Boards of Guardians, who sent children to Quatt.⁴⁴²

The consequence of this was that teachers in Union schools were often poorly paid. In 1847 some workhouse teachers in Cornwall and Hampshire were paid £6 a year

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 224, Table 5.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, p. 226.

⁴⁴² *The Quarterly Review* (1861 Reprint London: Forgotten Books, 2013) pp. 492 – 493.

while the average salary of workhouse schoolmasters was £25. The Wellington schoolmaster was paid £12. 10s., the Ellesmere Atcham and Bridgnorth schoolmasters were paid £25, £40 and £30 respectively. As an indication of Guardian attitudes the Wellington Board envisaged their schoolmaster as more of an assistant to the workhouse master than a teacher.⁴⁴³

In the first years after the Poor Law Amendment Act some Shropshire Unions struggled to appoint good candidates to the new posts of Workhouse Schoolteacher, particularly because they either underestimated the salary required or they placed little importance on education and chose not to pay the required salary. In 1847 nearly half of workhouse teachers in England and Wales had no previous teaching experience.⁴⁴⁴

The difficult issues surrounding recruitment and retention of good workhouse teachers are analysed below using examples from Shropshire Unions. The first schoolmaster and mistress of the new workhouse school in Ludlow were Mr. and Mrs. Jones, receiving an annual salary of £26. They were to have the same privileges as the Master and Matron of the Workhouse, namely board and lodging. Coincidentally at the same time Henry Hopewell was appointed as Workhouse Porter at £25 per annum, with two meals a day. Notwithstanding the fact that the Schoolmaster and Mistress received accommodation, which the porter did not, it perhaps indicates the Guardians' perception of the importance of pauper education that the two schoolteachers earned approximately the same between them as the porter.

⁴⁴³ SA: Wellington Poor Law Union Minute Book B, 5 January 1843.

⁴⁴⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1847 – 1848 LIII - 353, *Return of the Annual Amount of Salaries paid in the year 1847 to the Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses of each Poor Law Union in England and Wales*, p. 2 – 22.

Perhaps Mrs. Jones was viewed as Mr. Jones' appendage and therefore there was no compulsion to give her a salary.

Mr. Jones was dismissed because of absenteeism, and Mrs. Jones, who continued to teach in the House, was unable to co-exist with the Master and Matron and had to be dismissed also. Perhaps the Guardians paid the penalty for having to appoint the quality of people the poor salary attracted. When they made a new appointment in 1841 the Guardians again showed their lack of commitment to pauper education. They stated 'it is inexpedient to employ a schoolmaster for the children of the Union Workhouse and that an efficient female can be appointed to take the care and management of both Boys and Girls and to teach them on the Infant and National Systems and to train the children to habits of Industry and Usefulness'. They advertised the post and asked the National Society to recommend 'an efficient schoolmistress' which the National Society were unable to do.⁴⁴⁵

In 1837 the Ellesmere Guardians paid a schoolmistress £10 per annum, with no board and lodging, correctly calculating that a schoolmistress would be cheaper to employ than a schoolmaster. This was a low salary, and it was unusual not to offer board and lodging to teachers. Board and lodging was a mixed blessing because it meant living in the workhouse and eating the workhouse diet. The salaries of other Ellesmere Union officers were similar to those of other local unions so it appears that education was chosen as the area in which to save money.⁴⁴⁶ When Ellesmere Union employed John Roberts as a schoolmaster in late 1837 he was only paid £15,

⁴⁴⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 12 May 1841, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁶ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England 1834 – 1880', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, pp. 213, 214.

whereas schoolmasters in Atcham and Bridgnorth received at least £30 per annum.⁴⁴⁷

Perhaps as a result of the reasonable salaries paid to their teachers both Atcham and Bridgnorth were able to recruit people with previous teaching experience. Atcham generally recruited teachers with previous experience. The exception is William Harries, who was appointed in September 1837 but is described by Livingston as previously a school teacher, but it is not clear why she stated that.⁴⁴⁸ In fact the Atcham Guardians were very reluctant to appoint him because they “have no eligible person” for the post and appointed him “for the present with the view of discharging him if not found competent, or obtaining a more suitable person”.⁴⁴⁹ This statement by the Guardians shows a desire to appoint a competent teacher and not merely to fill the post as a bureaucratic exercise. Robert Rowlandson, appointed in 1842, was previously a teacher in the South Liverpool National School and George Cain appointed in 1852 had previous experience in a British and Foreign School.⁴⁵⁰ At Bridgnorth three of four appointments had experience. Ellesmere, with a low salary, appointed no experienced teachers. Madeley also appointed teachers with no experience.

The first master and matron of Madeley workhouse were Mr. and Mrs. Wildblood. Mr. Wildblood’s background was as a colour-sergeant in the army and following the decision to set up a workhouse school they were offered the posts of schoolmaster and schoolmistress. The Wildbloods had asked for their three children to live in the

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 215 – 216.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, Table 9, p. 230.

⁴⁴⁹ TNA: MH 12/9822, Poor Law Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, Clerk of the Atcham Union to the Poor Law Commission, 24 September 1837.

⁴⁵⁰ TNA: MH 12/9823, Poor Law Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1839 – 1842, Clerk of the Atcham Union to the Poor Law Commission, 7 March 1842 and MH 12/9825, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Clerk of the Atcham Union to the Poor Law Commission, 17 June 1852.

workhouse and as an inducement to the Guardians the Wildblood parents said that the children would assist in the teaching. When William Day wrote in his report of 1838 he described the schoolmaster and mistresses of Bridgnorth, Ellesmere and Atcham as competent or having a competent knowledge, his description of Mr. Wildblood was an unforgiving 'ex-colour sergeant'.⁴⁵¹ One can infer from this that Day could find no more positive description of him or his work as a teacher.

One of the factors that inhibited the payment of reasonable salaries to schoolmasters and schoolmistresses was the low number of children in some workhouse schools. Atcham Union consisted of 43 parishes, by far the largest in Shropshire. Initially, the school had seventeen pupils, a number which would have encouraged some unions to see children as a small responsibility. The Atcham Union, however, decided that seventeen was too few to constitute an effective school so it sent a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners in June 1837 for permission to create a bigger school. In the letter they suggested a salary of about £50, dependent on the number of children in the house. With some degree of foresight and positive thinking they also asked if the Poor Law Commission 'will inform them whether there is a society in London who educate or procure situations for schoolmasters.'⁴⁵² This was at a time when many Shropshire Unions were looking no farther than aged paupers or retired Warrant Officers as schoolmasters. Wem and Ellesmere in Shropshire and Llanfyllin in Montgomeryshire sent their children to Atcham, though the Atcham Guardians' minutes are festooned with demands for Llanfyllin to pay their fees and threats to send their children back to Wales if they did not. In fact, in May 1840 they lost patience with Llanfyllin and required it to collect their children or pay Atcham to transport them

⁴⁵¹ Parliamentary Papers, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission*, (1838) p.277.

⁴⁵² SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 5 June 1837, p. 37.

home. In 1838 Baldwyn Leighton, the Chairman of Atcham Guardians, wrote a report and in it he described 34 of the 42 children over the age of 6 as 'totally uneducated' and lamented the reading of the other 8.⁴⁵³ Twenty-three had never been to a religious establishment, but by 1850 the workhouse school was extensively praised by Andrew Doyle, the Poor Law Inspector.⁴⁵⁴ However by 1852 the school was being criticised by Doyle because the Guardians persisted in not appointing a schoolmistress. This was an issue which would be a source of conflict between Atcham and the central Authorities for many years. Atcham, under the leadership of Baldwyn Leighton, was ambitious to be successful as a Poor Law Union, and Leighton had strong opinions as to what that entailed. Developing a large school was part of that ambition.

Another factor that inhibited the appointment and retention of good teachers was the conditions of service of workhouse teachers. Part of his/her duties was as a subordinate to the Master or Matron of the workhouse and that implied a wide range of potential duties and also a lack of esteem, particularly striking if the teacher was better educated than the Master or Matron. Because the duties began early in the morning and extended into the middle evening it was usual for teachers to live in the workhouse which may have been uncongenial.

In his 1852/1853 report to the Committee of Council on Education Jelinger Symons described the difficulty of recruiting good teachers for poor law schools. He identified the reasons for difficulty of recruitment: the location of the school in the workhouse and the teacher's subservience to the master of the workhouse, particularly frustrating when the teacher was better educated than the workhouse master. Symons also

⁴⁵³ SA: PL 1/11/9/1, Report on the Progress of the Atcham Union, 1838, March 1838.

⁴⁵⁴ Parliamentary Papers, 1851, Andrew Doyle, *Reports relating to the Education and Training of Pauper Children*, 1850.

criticised Guardians for not understanding enough about schools, and therefore not being sufficiently skilled at selecting teachers. Writing about workhouse teachers Symons said, 'Where the teacher is comfortable (as a poor law teacher) he often proves incompetent; and where he is competent, he is seldom comfortable. For one cause or another, he seldom stays long'.⁴⁵⁵ This seems to imply that most poor law teachers who stay in post are also the teachers you least want in the post. Not surprisingly, there was a rapid turnover in teachers. In 1852 there was a survey of 64 workhouses in Wales and the West of England which showed 185 changes of teachers in four years.⁴⁵⁶

There are partial accounts of teachers' duties and workloads in Ludlow Union but there is a copy of Chesterfield Union regulations (Appendix 5) which would be very similar to Shropshire Union schools, because by the 1850s workhouse schools were inspected and regulated by the Committee of Council on Education. A glance at the duties of workhouse teachers gives an insight into their conditions of service.⁴⁵⁷ The summer hours of work began at 5.45 a.m. and ended at 8.30 p.m. and the winter hours extended from 6.45 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The teachers who worked these duties at Chesterfield Workhouse were allowed two evenings off a week from 6.30 p.m. until 10.00 p.m. in summer and until 9 p.m. in winter.⁴⁵⁸

School hours were listed at Ludlow showing that the children were expected to attend school from 9.30 to 12.00 and from 2.00 to 4.00 in the afternoon. By 1845 the hours

⁴⁵⁵ Parliamentary Papers, *Report by Jelinger Symons, Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, Schools of Parochial Unions, 1852 – 1853*, pp. 170 – 171.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ See Appendix 5.

⁴⁵⁸ Parliamentary Papers, *Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, Schools of Parochial Unions, 1854 – 1855*, p. 112; *Chesterfield Unions Regulation for Workhouse Teachers, 1850*.

had changed slightly in the light of experience and going on organised walks became a near daily occurrence, weather permitting. This list of school hours indicated the nature of the curriculum at that stage:

Duties of School (1845)

Hour of Rising 6 o'clock
 Washing till 7 o'clock
 Prayers and Breakfast till 7.30
 Recreation and Cleaning or Walking out till 10.

School commences at 10 o'clock with prayers and the Morning hymn
 From 10 to 10.30 Broken catechism
 From 10.30 to 11 Reading and Spelling
 From 11 to 11.30 Writing upon slates
 From 11.30 to 12 Cyphering and Tables
 From 12 to 2 Dinner and Recreation

Afternoon school commences at 2 o'clock
 Boys repeat the same as in the morning
 Girls sew and knit till 4.30 when school closes with Prayers and Evening Hymn

From 4.30 to 6 o'clock Recreation
 From 6 to 6.30 Supper and prayers
 At 7.30 go to bed.⁴⁵⁹

In 1846 there was a major improvement in the educational opportunities for workhouse children. In that year an Education Inspectorate was established, responsible to the Committee of Council on Education, which was a committee of the Privy Council.⁴⁶⁰ It established four grades of teacher, Permission, Probation, Competency and Efficiency in ascending order of quality.⁴⁶¹ Within each grade there were three subsections, effectively making a twelve-point scale. The Committee of Council in Education inspected teachers, graded them, and paid appropriate salaries,

⁴⁵⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, (inside front cover).

⁴⁶⁰ N. Ball, *Her Majesty's Inspectorate, 1839 - 1849* (University of Birmingham, 1963).

⁴⁶¹ See Appendix 6.

and as a *quid pro quo* for the central funding of teachers' salaries, workhouse schools were required to be open to official inspection.

Duke writes that the impact of the new Inspection and teacher grading regime was dramatic. The teachers inspected in the first years were those who were low achieving, which resulted in resignations of some. The salary teachers could receive was influenced by the grade they received. Unfortunately, there were only five Inspectors for all of England and Wales. The initial survey of schools by the Inspectorate revealed that a typical workhouse teacher had the skills of a pupil teacher in his first or second year, who would generally be a 14 year-old child.⁴⁶²

The offer to pay teachers' salaries relieved a financial burden on Poor Law Unions and enabled the Committee of Council on Education to influence the quality of teaching, the type of teaching (for example, industrial training) and choice of teaching aids in workhouse schools. A certificate of teaching ability sent to Mrs. Sarah Jones 'mistress of the Cleobury Mortimer Parochial Union School' by the Committee of Council on Education in 1853 shows that teachers were examined on 11 categories, 8 of which were based on academic subject knowledge, such as Reading and Arithmetic, 1 was 'Industrial Skill', and another was 'Skill as a Teacher'. The final category was 'State of School' which was shown to be 'Stationary'. The teacher was graded Probation, Second Division. The school had a roll of 12, because the majority of Cleobury Mortimer children were educated at Quatt. It is likely that the 12 remaining were too young to go to Quatt, or not suitable in some way. The grant from the Committee of Council on Education for the teacher's salary was £17. 16s. The covering letter addressed to the Cleobury Mortimer Union clerk from the Poor

⁴⁶² Francis Duke, 'Pauper Education', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan 1976), p. 75.

Law Board stated clearly that the Union must pay the teacher at least as much as the grant of £17. 16s. and if they choose to pay more than £17. 16s. the Union would have to find the difference.⁴⁶³

Despite these considerable disadvantages some Unions made good decisions about the appointment and retention of teachers. Eventually the Ludlow Guardians made a good appointment in Lavinia Moon (who was graded Efficiency I) and took steps to retain her when she was considering moving to Quatt. In 1848 Miss Graham, the schoolmistress, left because of ill-health though it is clear that she had a poor relationship with the Master and Matron, poor enough for it to be noted by the Guardians.⁴⁶⁴ The Guardians asked Mr. Kennedy of the National School, Westminster, to help find a new schoolmistress.

When they did hold interviews for the post they had seven candidates and they invited Symons (or perhaps he invited himself) to assist with the interviews. Five candidates were rejected immediately, one because she did not appear to settle anywhere for long, two were under twenty with no experience and two were poorly educated. Symons was confident that both the other candidates would be good enough and recommended both Lavinia Moon and Elizabeth Adams to the Guardians, who chose Elizabeth Adams.⁴⁶⁵ The Minutes of 9th August of that year are particularly interesting because they stated that Mrs. Adams started work on 2nd August but resigned before the date of the Guardians' meeting a week later. She felt that during the winter there might be more children in the school and she would not

⁴⁶³ SA: PL 5/85, Cleobury Mortimer Union. The Inspection Report shows that the schoolmistress was examined on Religious Knowledge, Spelling, Penmanship, Arithmetic, Grammar, History, Geography, Reading, Industrial Skill, Skill as a teacher and State of School.

⁴⁶⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, 3 November 1847, p. 177.

⁴⁶⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1848 – 1849, 26 July 1848, p. 237.

cope with the demands. Later that month Lavinia Moon was unanimously chosen.⁴⁶⁶

Symons persuaded the Guardians to give Miss Moon two hours to herself every day, thus improving her conditions of service. In 1849 Symons inspected Lavinia Moon and her classroom and recommended a pay rise, and in June 1849 he reported of the 'good and pleasing conduct of Miss Moon' and the good progress of the children.⁴⁶⁷

In March 1851 the Poor Law Board informed the Guardians that following Symons report Lavinia Moon's annual salary should increase from £28.16s.0d to £34.4s.0d.

The Guardians agreed to this because they were pleased with the school but told Symons that the pay increase was based on a mistaken assessment of the school roll. Symons had written that there were 56 children whereas there were only 36.⁴⁶⁸

At the meeting of 2nd April the Guardians clearly said that they were content to pay Moon's pay rise, yet on 30th April they changed their minds and said it should revert to the original amount. Later in 1851 the disgruntled Miss Moon seemed to have talked to Jelinger Symons and he recommended that she apply for a vacancy at the South East District School at Quatt. Miss Moon told the Governors that because of her salary reduction she had applied for a job at Quatt and the Clerk at Quatt asked Ludlow for a reference for her. The Ludlow Guardians then realised that Jelinger Symons had recommended Moon to Quatt and accused Symons of inducing their teacher to leave Ludlow.⁴⁶⁹ Jelinger Symons protested his innocence but the stratagem (if that is what it was) worked superbly because the Guardians (probably with a bad grace) then offered Lavinia Moon a salary of £36.10s.0d.⁴⁷⁰ This does

⁴⁶⁶ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1848 – 1849, 9 August 1848, p. 241.

⁴⁶⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 25 June 1849, p. 15.

⁴⁶⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, 2 April 1851, p. 141.

⁴⁶⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 24 December 1851, p. 191.

⁴⁷⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 29 December 1851, p. 194.

indicate that the Ludlow Guardians were prepared to pay a reasonable salary to retain their teacher, if only under pressure.

Similarly to Ludlow, the Bridgnorth Guardians made a good choice in 1837 by appointing Henry Garland (formerly a baker) as schoolmaster for their workhouse school at Quatt. There was concern later among some members of the Guardians because he was a dissenter. The Guardians who complained too late were reminded that they should have objected at the time of his appointment.⁴⁷¹ William Day stated that had he been present at the interview he would have vetoed the appointment.⁴⁷² Garland was obviously a pragmatic man and carried out religious services to everybody's satisfaction. More seriously and practically Garland had been appointed on the understanding that he knew the National Society system, which he admitted before he took up the post that he did not, and the Guardians wisely advised him to go to London to train, and five weeks later he returned with the appropriate certificate.⁴⁷³ Garland proved a good appointment and over the years impressed William Day, Whitmore and Jelinger Symons and he remained at the school for 22 years. Symons consistently praised the Quatt School and its successor the South East District School. The School was organised on the same form of industrial training advocated by James Kay.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ Lance Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Volume LXXXII, (2007), p. 86.

⁴⁷² J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, p.195.

⁴⁷³ Lance Smith, 'William Wolryche Whitmore of Bridgnorth', *Journal of Telford Historical and Archaeological Society*, p. 24.

⁴⁷⁴ James Kay, *Training of Pauper Children* (E. J. Marten, 1970).

Garland also received an Efficiency I certificate in the first year of the Parliamentary Grant.⁴⁷⁵ From 1849 to 1862 the schoolmaster received an efficiency certificate for 13 of those years, with 1 year of competency. Of the assistant master at Bridgnorth/Quatt, over the period 1852 to 1861 there were 3 efficiency certificates, 5 competency and 2 not known. Livingstone records that the average metropolitan schoolmaster's salary in 1847 was £35 per annum whereas Garland's salary at Bridgnorth (Quatt) in 1849 was £60. Also she notes that of the four appointments made between 1837 and 1852 three were already schoolmasters. It seems that Whitmore and his Guardians had the ability to identify potential when recruiting. Appointments of male teachers at Bridgnorth/Quatt were eminently successful. Lewis Roach became assistant schoolmaster and remained at the school until retirement, when he held the superintendent and schoolmaster posts.

Roach married Henry Garland's daughter, Susannah, who was then the schoolmistress. Susannah became Matron in 1859 and ceased teaching. After that time it became difficult to retain schoolmistresses and female industrial teachers. There was a contrast between the stability and longevity of male teaching appointments, and the rapid turnover of female staff. Susannah Garland was appointed schoolmistress at the South East Shropshire District School in 1854.⁴⁷⁶ A year later, Andrew Doyle included in an Inspection Report the remark that she was overworked and needed assistance.⁴⁷⁷ As a result the Directors of the school made an appointment for the post of Female Industrial Teacher at £12 p.a. and that post

⁴⁷⁵ Parliamentary Papers, 1847 – 1849, *Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education*, XLII.243, p. 34. See Appendix 6 for an explanation of the Committee of Council on Education teacher grading system.

⁴⁷⁶ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 10 February 1854.

⁴⁷⁷ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 20 April 1855.

was filled by Mary Haycock who resigned eleven months later when pregnant, to be succeeded by Hannah Probert.⁴⁷⁸

There is no evidence of correspondence relating to Probert's resignation or dismissal, but Elizabeth Garland (daughter of the School Superintendent) was appointed to what appears to be Hannah Probert's job at a salary of £20 p.a., a wage increase of £8 p.a. (66%).⁴⁷⁹ Alerted by the appointment of Elizabeth Garland, the Poor Law Board enquired about Hannah Probert who they thought was still in post.⁴⁸⁰ The Directors of the School replied that Elizabeth Garland had succeeded Elizabeth Humphries, even though the Poor Law Board had requested information only about Hannah Probert.⁴⁸¹ Showing perseverance, the Poor Law Board again asked the School about Hannah Probert.⁴⁸² At that point the School Directors replied that Hannah Probert had resigned to live with her husband, and her post was temporarily taken by a servant who later went to Australia.⁴⁸³

It may have been administrative ineptitude on the part of the Directors of the School or the Superintendent in not providing information to the Poor Law Board even when explicitly asked, but in the light of later events it does raise doubts about decision making over staffing matters and staff relationships within the school.

⁴⁷⁸ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 7 July 1855, 21 June 1856, 13 June 1856.

⁴⁷⁹ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 10 June 1858.

⁴⁸⁰ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 15 June 1858.

⁴⁸¹ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 23 June 1858.

⁴⁸² TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 30 June 1858.

⁴⁸³ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 1 July 1858.

At that time Andrew Doyle, a Poor Law Inspector, wrote an internal memo to Poor Law Board colleagues expressing concerns about nepotism at the school. He wrote that the school employment structure was dominated by the Garland family.

“Superintendent	Mr. Garland
Matron	Mrs. Garland
Schoolmaster	Mr. Garland’s son-in-law
Schoolmistress	Mr. Garland’s daughter
Industrial Trainer	Mr. Garland’s daughter.

I do not mean to imply that any of these officers are inefficient though I think it impolitic to make such an establishment so wholly dependent on one family.”⁴⁸⁴

Four months later an Inspection report on Elizabeth Garland, Industrial Trainer, stated that she was unsatisfactory and the Inspector is “unable to award any grant” for her as Industrial Trainer. As a result she was dismissed and the post was given to Ellen Moore at a salary of £10 p.a., half of Elizabeth Garland’s salary.⁴⁸⁵ Ellen Moore resigned within a year “to obtain another situation”.⁴⁸⁶ Her replacement Anne Haycox resigned after a few months with the probable reason being to get married.⁴⁸⁷

In November 1860 Isabel Haynes was appointed as Industrial Trainer, but resigned in March 1861.⁴⁸⁸ Her reason for leaving was given as wishing to live with her aunt.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁴ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 4 July 1858.

⁴⁸⁵ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 11 February 1859.

⁴⁸⁶ TNA: MH 27/78, Poor Law Administration Department, 1854 – 1859, South East Shropshire School District, 16 January 1860, 10 February 1860.

⁴⁸⁷ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 17 October 1860.

⁴⁸⁸ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 29 November 1860, 5 March 1861.

⁴⁸⁹ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 12 October 1861.

Haynes was succeeded by Mary Ann Ebrey, but left soon after “by her own desire”.⁴⁹⁰

The next Industrial Trainer, Elizabeth Clark, resigned after less than seven months, apparently through illness.⁴⁹¹ Anna Turner, appointed in January 1863, resigned in June 1863, stating no reason.⁴⁹²

In the next three years, the school lost an assistant schoolmaster (no reason given for resignation), three female industrial trainers (no reason given for resignation), two male industrial trainers (no reason given for resignation), and one assistant schoolmaster (having obtained another situation).⁴⁹³ The contrast is stark between the stability of the Superintendent and Schoolmaster incumbents and the junior appointments, largely women but including some men. This is surely connected in some way with the difficulty of outsiders working with the Garland family. Despite this sustained period of staff upheaval the school was described by Inspector of Workhouse Schools Browne thus: “This school has long been very efficient and fully maintains its character”.⁴⁹⁴

In 1854 Garland had provided Symons with evidence of the success of the school. Of 36 girls who were former pupils of the school, 12 were married, 13 were placed in domestic service, three had become ‘very respectable’ dressmakers, one worked with her brother, one was employed in a carpet factory and one was a schoolmistress in

⁴⁹⁰ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 1 October 1861, 2 August 1862.

⁴⁹¹ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 10 July 1862, 6 December 1862, 12 January 1863.

⁴⁹² TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 12 January 1863, 12 June 1863.

⁴⁹³ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 29 February 1864, 3 May 1865, 15 December 1865, 8 January 1866, 5 March 1866, 10 March 1866, 25 August 1866, 31 November 1866, 22 December 1866.

⁴⁹⁴ TNA: MH 27/79, Poor Law Administration Department, 1860 – 1866, South East Shropshire School District, 24 May 1866.

Gloucester. Of 33 boys, 10 had become labourers or entered domestic service, and the others worked in various industrial undertakings, or military service.⁴⁹⁵

Atcham Union also made two good teacher appointments in Rowlandson and Welland but relations between Baldwyn Leighton, the Chair of the Guardians, and the Poor Law Board and the Committee of Council on Education became acrimonious and Leighton refused to listen to their advice and in consequence his teachers' conditions of service worsened, which was commonly the cause of teacher resignation.

During the period of 1849 – 1862, Atcham Workhouse school had an Efficient graded teacher for two years and a Competent graded teacher for the other twelve years.⁴⁹⁶

The schoolmasters whom they appointed had generally had previous teaching experience. It is only after 1847 and the introduction of the inspection regime that one can make accurate judgements of teacher's ability, based on evidence. Robert Rowlandson was appointed at Atcham in 1842 and was paid £40 per annum. Symons inspected him in 1848, 1849 and 1850 and awarded Rowlandson a Competency II certificate which triggered a parliamentary grant of £36. While Leighton and his colleagues paid a high salary in the hope of achieving high standards, Symons inevitably had wider experience and could judge Rowlandson in the context of other teachers. The inspector expected Rowlandson to teach industrial training (which he did not do at that stage) to obtain a higher certificate and therefore higher salary.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Parliamentary Papers, 1854 – 1855, Jelinger Symons, *General Report, Committee of Council on Education*, (1854 – XLII767), pp. 160 – 161.

⁴⁹⁶ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, pp. 227 - 228.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 230.

In 1851 Rowlandson became the workhouse master and therefore received an increase in salary. He was succeeded by Walter Welland who rated an Efficiency III certificate which triggered a salary of £48. 10s. Despite a reasonable salary he only stayed in post for two years. His successor George Cain stayed for only one year. Why was this? The issues in which the Atcham Guardians were in dispute with the Poor Law Board and the Committee of Council in Education were the refusal of the Union to enlarge its schoolroom and to appoint a schoolmistress. The result was that the schoolmaster had to teach a large class in cramped conditions. This is likely to have been a factor in the rapid turnover of schoolmasters.⁴⁹⁸

Leighton was not necessarily adamant in his opposition to the appointment of a schoolmistress but in 1838 and 1839 'five schoolmistresses came on trial during 1838, but all were found to be incompetent'.⁴⁹⁹ In 1851 he was apprehensive about a possible conflict between a matron and schoolmistress.⁵⁰⁰ Symons, an advocate of industrial training, wrote of Atcham to the Committee of Council on Education in 1851 stating that the master could not possibly "teach all the boys and the girls properly and give industrial training".⁵⁰¹ The Committee of Council on Education wrote to the Poor Law Board a year later saying that the large Atcham class was more 'than any single teacher can hope to instruct efficiently without pupil teachers'.⁵⁰² Atcham Union highlighted inconsistencies in Symons evaluation of the Union's industrial

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, p 231.

⁴⁹⁹ TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1854, Leighton to Poor Law Board, 13 October 1851.

⁵⁰⁰ TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1854, Atcham to Poor Law Board, letter undated, received 23 October 1851.

⁵⁰¹ TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1855, cited in letter from Committee of Council on Education to Poor Law Board, 2 September 1851.

⁵⁰² TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1855, Committee of Council on Education to Poor Law Board, 28 January 1852.

training for girls, in which he issued both commendations and criticisms within a few months.⁵⁰³

By October 1851 the Unions attitude hardened further with Leighton writing a firm letter to the Poor Law Board. In it he said that the classroom space was 'ample', Symons had suggested 'unsuitable' books and the union disagreed fundamentally with the need to appoint a schoolmistress. He also wrote that there were many 'good public charity schools' with classes larger than Atcham's school and there were not enough girls on the register to justify employing a schoolmistress.⁵⁰⁴ At that stage there were 29 girls in the school. The Poor Law Board and the Committee of Council on Education eventually ceased to correspond with Atcham on the matter. In 1857 Leighton appointed a 'work-mistress' but not a schoolmistress.⁵⁰⁵

There was no mechanism by which the Poor Law Board could take action against a Board of Guardians not appointing a schoolmistress. But they could withdraw the parliamentary grant if the union failed to keep a daily school register which Atcham failed to do adequately in 1851 and as a consequence received stiff warnings from the Committee of Council on Education.⁵⁰⁶ The Industrial Training for boys also began to accord with the Poor Law Board and Symon's wishes. By the 1860s the school was receiving generally good reports from Inspectors about its industrial training for boys. Girls' industrial training remained poor, however, with the matron supervising simple domestic duties, like cleaning, mending and child-minding. A

⁵⁰³ TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1855, cited in letter from Walter Welland, Atcham Schoolmaster to Symons, 6 September 1851.

⁵⁰⁴ TNA MH 12/9825, Atcham Union Correspondence, 1851 – 1855, Atcham Union to Poor Law Board, undated letter, received 23 October 1851.

⁵⁰⁵ Parliamentary Papers, 1857 – 1858 Jelinger Symons, *General Report, Committee of Council on Education*, (2386), p. 200.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.200.

schoolmistress was appointed a year after Baldwyn Leighton's death in 1871, so the opposition to her appointment died with Leighton.⁵⁰⁷

In contrast to Atcham, Ellesmere appointed a schoolmistress in 1837 but they only paid £10 per annum with no board or lodging. However, the act of appointing a cheaper schoolmistress, rather than a more expensive schoolmaster is significant. Her salary was also lower than other local Unions' schoolmistresses, but in other facets of Union life the Ellesmere Guardians paid similar salaries to other unions. The implication seems to be that the Guardians placed a low value on education. This is also suggested by the employment of a schoolmistress, instead of a schoolmaster, who would have commanded a higher salary. When they did employ John Roberts as a schoolmaster in late 1837 he was only paid £15.⁵⁰⁸

The Chairman of Ellesmere Union in the early years of its existence was Robert Slaney, a prominent landowner, a Member of Parliament, Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and a man very concerned with the education of poor children. When he spoke about poor children he meant the children of independent but still poor families. He described his chairmanship of the Union as an 'irksome but important duty'. Because he was a national figure he was often away from Ellesmere and therefore unable to consistently influence policies.

Certificates awarded to teachers at Ellesmere after Inspections were almost always at probation level for both schoolmasters and schoolmistresses. This compares poorly with Atcham and Bridgnorth whose teachers were regularly graded competent and

⁵⁰⁷ SA: PL 1/2/2/7, Atcham Union Minute Book, 20 May 1872.

⁵⁰⁸ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England 1834 – 1880', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, January 1993, pp. 215 – 216.

efficient. Salaries of both sexes of teachers were consistently below that of Atcham and often less than a third of salaries in Bridgnorth.

Shropshire Workhouses and District Schools

The history of workhouse schools up to 1870 can best be understood by recognising that 1846 was a watershed in their development. Prior to that date Guardians and the Central Authorities worked (well or poorly) to provide an education service for pauper children. In 1846 the Committee of Council on Education and an Education Inspectorate came to their aid.

In the following pages, this section will analyse the establishment of Shropshire Workhouse Schools in their first twelve years. Following that it will show how the Committee of Council on Education and the Inspectorate impacted on these schools and finally it will analyse the manner in which the school at Quatt, near Bridgnorth became successful.

As we have seen above many Shropshire Workhouse schools were small, inhibiting the payment of reasonable salaries, but the Guardians of two Unions, Bridgnorth and Atcham had ambitions for pauper education and decided that size of school was an important factor in pursuing that ambition. Atcham, though, failed to realise that ambition because they failed to recognise the link between large numbers of pupils and the need for increased resources.

Workhouse schools had one striking advantage over schools outside of the workhouse. Education was effectively compulsory, though interspersed with work. Once a school had been established by a union it was impossible for children not to

attend unless the workhouse authorities found other employment, such as manning the water pump, as at Ludlow. Growing crops for cash or inmates' food was viewed as industrial training and preparation for the life of an independent agricultural labourer. Outside the workhouse children from poor families were able and often compelled to work in the fields, or in the mines and ironworks of Madeley and Wellington, instead of attending school. With wealthier families less likely to need to send their young children out to work and therefore more likely to send them to school those who were most likely to be uneducated were the children of the non-workhouse poor.

Workhouse education being compulsory, however, is not automatically synonymous with education being valuable, worthwhile and well-delivered. It is perhaps not surprising that a system of education administered locally should be very variable in its quality, as was the case in Shropshire. As we have seen Shropshire Workhouse schools varied in size, and Boards of Guardians varied in quality and commitment to education. Most Unions chose to educate their children within their mixed workhouse because it appeared to be the most obvious arrangement.⁵⁰⁹ It had the advantage of utilising a building (sometimes newly-built), while its prime disadvantage lay in the proximity of the pupils to adult paupers, some of whom might be poor role-models, particularly when workhouses were expected to house the recalcitrant able-bodied.

The number of pupils in each workhouse was also a factor since small numbers made providing a paid teacher expensive. In 1838 Shifnal had the smallest number of

⁵⁰⁹ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

pupils with three 'capable of receiving instruction', and the largest numbers of pupils were found at Bridgnorth (30), Ellesmere (48) and Atcham (52) pupils respectively.⁵¹⁰

At the establishment of the Bridgnorth Union the Guardians led by William Wolryche Whitmore located the school in an old poor house near Quatt, 3 miles from Bridgnorth. This was a considered decision to remove the children from the other workhouse inmates and reflected Whitmore's interest in working class education. The decision also placed the school in the same village as his home, thus allowing him convenient access.⁵¹¹

Whitmore had been Vice-President of the Management Committee of Bridgnorth National School. He assisted the school in providing the pupils (not paupers) with mental, moral and industrial training.⁵¹² In both organisations Whitmore's primary aim and achievement was to provide gainful employment for children when they left school.⁵¹³

The Quatt School was established in 1837 with 36 – 40 children, both boys and girls. In contrast to most other Shropshire Unions industrial training began almost immediately with the boys working on the land, and girls undertaking domestic training.⁵¹⁴ From its inception, the school gave each boy a plot of land to cultivate by himself, and he received a share of the profits from his crops. Whitmore was committed to severing the pauperism link between generations and he used self-

⁵¹⁰ Parliamentary Papers, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission*, Appendix B.

⁵¹¹ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, 1993, pp. 190 – 194.

⁵¹² William Wolryche Whitmore was Whig Member of Parliament for Bridgnorth and a large landowner. He lived at Dudmaston Hall, in the village of Quatt which was three miles from Bridgnorth. He held critical views of adult paupers and felt that pauper children would benefit from being separated from adult pauper influence.

⁵¹³ William Wolryche Whitmore, *A memoir relating to the industrial school at Quatt, addressed to the rate-payers of the South East Shropshire District School*, LSE Library, LSE Selected Pamphlets, (1849).

⁵¹⁴ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London Guildhall University, 1993, p. 196.

motivation to achieve that. His vocational training included spade husbandry, baking and domestic economy and dairy work, similar to James Kay's 'The Training of Pauper Children'.⁵¹⁵ The Quatt system of industrial training was praised by Education Inspector Symons.⁵¹⁶

Kay and Tufnell viewed boys' education as more important than girls', because boys would ideally grow up to be breadwinners. Kay and Tufnell were determined to avoid girls drifting into prostitution however and felt that training for domestic service was necessary but was easy to teach by an unqualified woman. The underlying assumption was that training for domestic service was 'but a stop on the way to marriage'.⁵¹⁷ Simonton writes that in the eighteenth century such education and training as was available to girls was often limited to preparation for their roles as wives and mothers, which also accorded with Victorian domestic ideology.⁵¹⁸

Later Developments post-1846

As examples of inspections, Jelinger Symons visited Clun workhouse in 1849 and questioned the non-attendance in school of some children. He also reminded the Guardians of the importance of teaching spade husbandry to boys and recommended school books and equipment.⁵¹⁹ Symons also inspected Drayton workhouse school

⁵¹⁵ J. Kay, 'The Training of Pauper Children; On the Establishment of County or District Schools, for the Training of the Pauper Children Maintained in Union Workhouses', Part I, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 1, No. 1 May, 1838 (Wiley for the Royal Statistical Society), pp. 14 – 27.

⁵¹⁶ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, 1993, p. 196.

⁵¹⁷ C. Bischof, 'Masculinity, Social Mobility, and the Plan to End Pauperism in Mid-Victorian England: Kneller Hall Teachers' Training College', *Journal of Social History* vol. 46 no. 4 (2013), pp. 1039 – 1059.

⁵¹⁸ D. Simonton, 'Schooling the poor: gender and class in eighteenth-century England', *British Journal for Eighteenth-century Studies* 23 (2000), p. 183 – 202.

⁵¹⁹ SA: PL 6/23, Clun Union Minute Book, 1844 – 1857, 28 June 1849, p. 151.

in November 1848 and he told the Guardians that he would recommend the payment of the teachers' salary once the Union had bought maps of the Holy Land and England and Wales.⁵²⁰

The Drayton Guardians refused to buy the maps (cost 4s. 6d.) even though that prevented the repayment of the schoolmistress's salary. Financially this made no sense because the Union would lose a significant amount of money for a small outlay. The Guardians were clearly motivated by other factors. Perhaps they thought that the Poor Law Board had no right to interfere with their Union and/or perhaps they had a negative attitude to pauper education. The Guardians were divided on the maps issue, however, and a proposal to buy the maps (and therefore receive money for the teacher's salary) was presented at a subsequent meeting, but the proposal was defeated by 12 votes to 4.⁵²¹ Clearly relations between Jelinger Symons and the majority of the Drayton Guardians were at a low ebb.

The Madeley Guardians, possibly viewing School Inspectors' reports as a device for receiving money, bought a writing desk, a dozen class reading books of the Irish Society, maps of England and Palestine and a blackboard for the teaching of arithmetic, as recommended by Symons.⁵²²

The Committee of Council on Education and its inspectors were concerned about the viability of small size union schools, such as were found nationally in small rural Unions such as Shropshire's Shifnal, Church Stretton, Newport, Wem and Cleobury Mortimer. Details of inspections of all Shropshire workhouse schools are available in

⁵²⁰ SA: PL 7/9, Drayton Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1854, 12 December 1849, p. 62.

⁵²¹ SA: PL 7/9, Drayton Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1854, 26 December 1849, pp. 66 – 67.

⁵²² SA: PL 10/5, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1859, 11 July 1851, p. 77.

the Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education.⁵²³ While District schools tended to be seen by some educationalists as primarily urban, Poor Law Inspector Doyle and School Inspector Symons viewed Shropshire as fertile ground for an alternative to the typically small rural school.

In 1851 the Newport Guardians were in lengthy discussions with Poor Law Inspector Doyle about moving children to another school. At that time they housed their children at the old Gnosall workhouse, but they felt it was an unsatisfactory building and would need expensive alterations to make it suitable. They adhered to the principle of housing and educating children separately from the other paupers and did consider consolidating all paupers except children in an improved Newport workhouse, with children taught elsewhere. The Guardians wanted to send their children to be educated at Wellington, but Poor Law Inspector Doyle persuaded them to send their children to Stafford workhouse, to which they could send forty children at 4s. per head per week.⁵²⁴ That arrangement continued for a few years, but by 1858 the Newport pauper children had also been transferred to the South East Shropshire District School at Quatt. They sent twenty-four children, increasing in 1867 to forty.⁵²⁵

In 1849 Symons talked to the Ludlow Guardians about the possible formation of a District School near Ludlow. The Guardians along with eight other unions sent representatives to a meeting to discuss this proposal. The representatives reported back to the Ludlow Board that they felt that the large size of the projected school would be impractical. One of the reasons Symons gave for setting up a District

⁵²³ See Appendix 7.

⁵²⁴ SA: PL 11/6, Newport Union Minute Book, 1853 1858, 12 September 1854, p. 181; 2 January 1855, p. 213; 8 May 1855, p. 249.

⁵²⁵ SA: 3990/12, 27 February 1858, 'N' List, Newport Deeds Collection.

School was to provide industrial training, if separate unions were reluctant or unable to do this. Having disregarded the possibility of a District School the Ludlow Guardians in 1849 appointed an Industrial Trainer and equipped an industrial training room.⁵²⁶

At Bridgnorth, however, the county had a determined Union Chairman committed to education and a separate Workhouse School at Quatt. The school at Quatt was renamed the South East Shropshire District School in 1849 with a roll of approximately 140 and contained children from Bridgnorth, Madeley, Cleobury Mortimer, and the Staffordshire Union of Seisdon. Despite his support for the school Symons criticised it because of building deficiencies, a lack of staffing and separate teaching of boys and girls (presumably of academic subjects).

It seems that Symons and the Inspectorate now expected more from Union schools than they had in the 1830s and 1840s. Unlike the parochial stubbornness of Atcham when it was criticised, Whitmore met Symons immediately and came to an agreement that two more teachers would be appointed so that the children could be taught in mixed sex classes according to age and with Mr. and Mrs. Garland's management functions increased, they received salary increases.⁵²⁷

With the addition of more pupils the site was found to be too small. The other Unions involved in the school refused to fund new premises and Whitmore failed to raise money elsewhere. Seeing no alternative he used his own money and leased a seventeenth century building known as the Dower House and land on his own Dudmaston Estate. A seventeenth century country residence looked very unlike a

⁵²⁶ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 2 May 1849, p. 8, and 3 October 1849, p. 31.

⁵²⁷ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England,' unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, 1993, p. 205.

nineteenth century workhouse. Later he leased more land of his own to build a hospital attached to the school.⁵²⁸

Industrial Training at the District School was regarded as excellent for boys and girls by Inspector Symons and in his reports to the Committee of Council on Education he consistently praised the school and described the Industrial Training at great length. The school was also praised in other quarters. 'At the excellent district school of Quatt (Shropshire) all the boys over 9 are required to assist in the work necessary to cultivate a farm of 10 acres arable and two pasture under the superintendence of a special teacher. School hours are from 9 to 12, before and after which they work upon the farm, or take their turn in looking after the stable and the cows. Even before the age of 9 they are occasionally put to light work. The profit earned by this means towards the cost of the maintenance of the 80 boys amounted last year to 70s. 0d.'⁵²⁹ Whitmore's main interest was in industrial training, and Livingstone records that he was only interested in rudimentary academic education.⁵³⁰ Other schools had the opportunity to establish Industrial Training for boys and girls, and had encouragement from Symons. These opportunities were only partly taken, and sometimes in a tokenistic way such as visits by a shoemaker. Girls were sometimes neglected and their Industrial Training was often linked to the domestic needs of the workhouse.

If the long term success of the Quatt School was primarily attributable to Whitmore, the day-to-day success was attributable to Henry Garland who was graded Efficiency,

⁵²⁸ Ibid, p. 203.

⁵²⁹ Parliamentary Papers, Stanhope's Report, *Commission on the Employment of Children, Young persons, and Women in Agriculture* (1867); Parliamentary Papers, *Second report of the commissioners*, with appendix part I, , 1868 – 69 [4202] [4202-I].

⁵³⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1852 – 1853, William Wolryche Whitmore, *Evidence to the Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Children, 1852*, XXIII, (674) Q 2948, p. 265.

along with Lavinia Moon at Ludlow. In contrast the teachers at Atcham, Clun and Whitchurch were graded Competency.

An indication of the quality of education provided can be gained by identifying the grade allocated to the various workhouse teachers. Permission and Probation grades indicated a low level of skill and knowledge. The grading and competency level of Shropshire workhouse teachers is described in Appendix 6. The teachers at Cleobury Mortimer (most of whose children were at the District School), Ellesmere and Shifnal were assessed as Probation, and the teachers at Church Stretton and Wem were assessed at only Permission grade, with John O'Leary at Wellington ungraded. Bearing in mind the negligible knowledge required to be graded Permission or Probation it is hard to envisage the children in their schools being educated in any acceptable way.⁵³¹

Symons also reported in 1857 that the education at the Quatt School was better than that provided at National and British Schools. When Garland left the school to emigrate to New Zealand he wrote this about the pupils of the school, 'the children soon lose the dull heavy look so common in the workhouse, and by degrees their craft, and become buoyant and intelligent, healthy in body and mind, and capable of competing in any way with children brought up in a town, without their vice, which, after all, is the thing, the great thing, to be sought'.⁵³²

The District School was not without its difficulties however. As an example of the problems in harmonising the educational needs of separate and semi-autonomous Unions the managers of the school encountered difficulties with their funding formula.

⁵³¹ See Appendix 6.

⁵³² Parliamentary Papers, Henry Garland to Symons, September 19 1859, Symons, *General Report 1859*.

In 1850 the Madeley Guardians decided to send their children to the South East Shropshire District School and they elected four Guardians to the school board. In July 1851 the Madeley Guardians' minutes show that nearly all Madeley Union children attended the school at Quatt.⁵³³

From the beginning of the discussions about contracting out education the Guardians had been concerned about the cost of the venture. At this stage the roll of the South East Shropshire School comprised:

Bridgnorth Union children	62
Cleobury Mortimer Union children	21
Seisdon Union children	28
Madeley Union children	26
	<hr/>
Total	137

The establishment charges were £243.3.10. If this was allocated according to a number of children in the school (therefore fairly in Madeley's view) each Union would pay as follows:

Bridgnorth	£114. 4. 6
Cleobury Mortimer	37.10. 9
Seisdon	50. 1.10
Madeley	46. 9. 6

Unfortunately for Madeley the actual charges were allocated according to a formula based on the number of children residing in the Union areas, not the number attending the school. Under the formula actually used, the cost for the Unions was as follows:

⁵³³ SA: PL 10/5, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1859, 11 July 1851, p. 77.

Bridgnorth paid 9¾d. per week per child

Cleobury Mortimer paid 1s. 8¾d per week per child

Seisdon paid 1s. 1d. per week per child

Madeley paid 2s. 8d. per week per child.

Madeley was the only industrial area of the four and therefore had large numbers of children in work and this adversely affected the amounts paid by Madeley to the District School according to the actual formula. This must have been resolved at least partly to the Madeley Guardians' satisfaction since they continued to elect Guardians to the schools management board.⁵³⁴

The reasons why the school at Quatt was successful were varied. The personal commitment to the school shown by Whitmore was the most important factor. Before 1840 he and his wife lived primarily in London, but with his wife's death he decided to spend more time at Dudmaston, and devoted his time to his estate, the Bridgnorth National School and the school at Quatt. His wealth and status as a former Member of Parliament gave him influence in Bridgnorth. His appointment of Henry Garland as teacher was also very influential particularly as both Garland and later Roach worked at the school for a long time when there was rapid turnover in other poor law schools and in junior posts at Quatt.⁵³⁵ Whitmore was able to perceive Garland's qualities even though he had no teaching experience and lied about his knowledge, and was a dissenter.

The two main reasons for teacher dissatisfaction in workhouse schools were low salaries and poor conditions of service. Whitmore and the Bridgnorth Guardians

⁵³⁴ SA: PL 10/5, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1859, pp. 177 – 179, 21 January 1853.

⁵³⁵ Lewis Roach was Henry Garland's son-in-law, and succeeded Garland as Superintendent of the South East Shropshire District School. Roach trained as a teacher at Quatt while Garland was in charge.

avoided both these areas of dissatisfaction. The Newcastle Commission stated that the average salary of schoolmasters working outside of workhouses was twice that of teachers working inside workhouses.⁵³⁶ Grigg writes that by offering accommodation, workhouse posts would attract some aspirant teachers as a first posting.⁵³⁷ The Local Government Board recognised the poor working conditions of workhouse teachers. 'For instance, it appears to me unreasonable that a schoolmaster of upwards of thirty years of age should be compelled to be within the workhouse walls at nine o'clock, or half past nine, every night; or that he (the schoolmaster) should on every occasion be obliged to ask leave of the master of the workhouse before he can go outside; such regulations are not unknown in workhouses.'⁵³⁸ In addition to conditions of service, salary levels played a significant part in non-retention of staff.

In 1849 Garland earned £60, whereas the Atcham schoolmaster earned £36 and the Ellesmere schoolmaster earned £33. Garland rewarded the Bridgnorth Guardians and the school management board by being assessed Efficiency Grade 1 consistently. In comparison Atcham had an 'Efficient' schoolmaster for only two years out of fourteen, and Ellesmere had no 'efficient' schoolmaster at all. The Assistant Schoolmaster at South East Shropshire District School earned as much as the only schoolmaster at Atcham, which was a large school, and nearly twice as much as the schoolmaster at Ellesmere.⁵³⁹ The District School had a large roll, just

⁵³⁶ *The Royal Commission on the state of popular education in England 1861* Vol. 1, p. 3620 (Newcastle Report).

⁵³⁷ G. R. Grigg, 'Nurseries of ignorance'? Private adventure and dame schools for the working classes in nineteenth-century Wales, *History of Education*, May 2005, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 281.

⁵³⁸ *Fifth Annual Report of the Local Government Board*, - Appendix B, 1876 [C.1585], p. 142.

'Education of Pauper Children in the Northern District – Report for the Year 1875 by J. R. Morley, Esq., Inspector of Workhouse Schools'.

⁵³⁹ J. Livingstone, 'Pauper Education in Victorian England', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London Guildhall University, 1993, pp. 227, 228.

as did Atcham, but Garland had two assistant teachers, whereas the schoolmaster at Atcham had a roll of 75 children with no assistant. There is another contrast here between the District School and Atcham. Atcham, under the Chairmanship of Baldwyn Leighton had made a good start in the 1830s by investing in education by paying a good salary, but by the 1840s Leighton had set his mind against suggestions from central authorities that a schoolmistress be appointed, despite a large number of girls in the schools. Whereas Bridgnorth and the District School made good decisions consistently over the period Atcham's decision-making was inconsistent. Ludlow School under the tutelage of Lavinia Moon and Atcham School under the guidance of Robert Rowlandson were good schools, identified by inspection reports from the Committee of Council on Education and the grading of their teachers, but that quality was not maintained throughout the period.

Being in an establishment separate from the workhouse enabled Mr. and Mrs. Garland to avoid being managed by a workhouse master and while that meant onerous responsibilities, they were able to live up to those responsibilities unhindered by ignorant interference to be found in some workhouses.

Unlike large institutions known as Barrack Schools, the school at Quatt was always a manageable size but was also large enough to merit adequate resourcing and sufficient teachers to allow more age-related activities. One of its strengths was also its commitment to an active education with an emphasis on industrial and agricultural training especially for boys. This was also a weakness because Whitmore's lukewarm concern for academic education would have inhibited children's intellectual and occupational expectations and would have limited them to work only within the

expectations of their class. Girls were given a curriculum based on their future roles as domestic servants, wives and mothers.

Social Control

Workhouse education was delivered to a proportion of the children who were the poorest in the country. Some of the poorest children existed on out-relief and were denied even that education. Workhouse education was delivered by classes of people, politicians, bureaucrats, some Guardians and teachers who were not from the same social class as the children to be taught. In these circumstances the deliverers of education were certain to impose order on the children, if only to establish a rudimentary order in a way that nineteenth century society found acceptable in an adult-child relationship.

The question to be addressed is whether the control exercised in workhouse schools was reasonable and benign in the circumstances of educating children who had no or little experience of working in groups. Also to be considered is whether the exercise of social control in workhouse schools replicated that exercised in non-workhouse schools of the time.

In Shropshire workhouse schools religious teaching created a significant backdrop to the education provided, and that can be seen in the early curriculum which had a considerable Anglican religious content, the school books provided only by the chaplain (pre-Committee of Council on Education), job descriptions of teachers, and maps and books provided by the Committee of Council on Education. All of these had a religious content.

Goldstrom reminds us that the National Society provided most Elementary Schools in England during the period 1834 – 1870 and that the religious content of the curriculum in those schools was similar to that of workhouse schools.⁵⁴⁰ The reading material was ‘Bibles, religious tracts and moralising tales’. The British and Foreign School Society used ‘Scripture lessons’, rather than the Bible as a vehicle for transmitting not only religious values but also lessons about respective roles in society. Both the Anglican and non-conformist societies wanted children to understand the natural reasons why some were poor and some rich and that society can be harmonious if everybody acknowledges their place.⁵⁴¹

While elementary schools had a religious ethos, they came under criticism from the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge who argued for secular education.⁵⁴² At the same time as the National Society began to be criticised for its adherence to the Bible as a teaching tool, so the Committee of Council on Education began to introduce less overtly religious texts into workhouse schools.

Aside from its religious aspect, the workhouse school curriculum was initially vulnerable to the whim of Guardians, particularly farmers who resented education being given to paupers when they and their children had not received it. The decision by some Unions not to teach writing was a clear decision to limit pauper children’s opportunities.⁵⁴³

Norfolk farmers wished to keep rural society as it was in the early nineteenth century because it suited their economic purpose. They wanted to have a pool of labour to

⁵⁴⁰ J. Goldstrom, ‘The content of education and the socialisation of the working-class child 1830 – 1860’, included in P. McCann (ed.) *Popular Education and Socialisation in the nineteenth Century* (Methuen 1977), pp. 93 - 110.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 94 – 98.

⁵⁴² Ibid, pp. 82.

⁵⁴³ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 189.

call on during the summer with the poor law authorities caring for their workers during the winter. They were concerned that academic education for poor children would give the poor opportunities to be socially mobile. Drill as performed in the large District Schools had a triple purpose. Firstly, it provided some measure of exercise, secondly it provided a form of training suited to a subordinate role in the armed forces, and thirdly as a method of inculcating obedience in large groups of children unused to institutional life. Hurt describes riots and arson in large District Schools, leading to the appointment of Drill Masters.⁵⁴⁴ Even in more modest sized Shropshire schools large class sizes, as at Atcham would have likely resulted in regimented learning using monitors, and militating against individual treatment of children. Teaching methods, such as the monitorial system with the teacher instructing pupils through the medium of monitors has an industrial ambience. 'It was the factory put into an educational setting. Every characteristic was there; minute division of labour; the assembly line, with children passed on from monitor to monitor until they issued complete from the top class.'⁵⁴⁵

Other writers also highlight the monitorial system as a means of social control and restraint.⁵⁴⁶ Jenifer Hart writes that 'the notion that the existing social structure was the creation of Divine Providence – so common in eighteenth-century England – continued largely unabated down into the 1870s if not beyond.'⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ J. Hurt, 'Drill, Discipline and the elementary school ethos', included in P. McCann (ed.), *Popular Education and Socialisation in the nineteenth Century* (Methuen 1977).

⁵⁴⁵ David Wardle, *English Popular Education, 1780 – 1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 87.

⁵⁴⁶ J. Tschurennev, 'Diffusing useful knowledge: the monitorial system of education in Madras, London and Bengal, 1789 – 1840', *Paedagogica Historica*, Vol. 44, No. 3, June 2008, pp. 245 – 264; P. McCann (ed.), *Popular Education and Socialisation in the nineteenth Century* (Methuen 1977); Parliamentary Papers, 1816, *Third report, Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee appointed to inquire into the education of the lower orders of the metropolis*, (495), p. 191.

⁵⁴⁷ J. Hart, 'Religion and Social Control in the Mid-nineteenth Century', in A. P. Donajrodzki (ed.), *Social Control in nineteenth Century Britain* (Croom Helm, 1977), p. 108.

Distinctions of rank were in the nature of things and were considered to be part of God's providence, and therefore immutable. In the sphere of pauperism and the workhouse those attitudes could be perceived in the lack of enthusiasm for pauper education exhibited by farmers in Digby's Norfolk and Shropshire's Bridgnorth and Ellesmere. If pauper education had to be provided then limiting that to reading (thus enabling the poor to read the Bible and scriptural commentaries), which emphasised social and gender distinctions was a solution. Reading allowed the pauper child to read others' ideas but writing enabled him/her to write his/her own ideas. Newport Poor Law Union was opposed to the teaching of writing and arithmetic.⁵⁴⁸ Norfolk had some similarities with Shropshire being largely agricultural and geographically isolated and some of their Guardians opposed the teaching of English geography because of what the children might learn about other places.⁵⁴⁹ Freer movement of labour as during the Industrial Revolution challenged the status quo, particularly challenging farmers' seasonal use of labour and encouraging lack of deference of poor people to employers.⁵⁵⁰ Gardner's analysis shows that the middle-class educational establishment viewed working-class education as a means of preserving the social order and the preservation of social roles.⁵⁵¹

James Kay was enthusiastic about teachers having books available for pupils, other than the Bible or other religious texts. He worked with two Battersea Training College teachers to collaboratively produce classroom books. Two phonetic readers and an arithmetic text book were written with the support and authority of the

⁵⁴⁸ SA: PL 11/4, Newport Poor Law Union, 1836 – 1850, 23 April 1839., p. 123.

⁵⁴⁹ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁵⁵⁰ G. Snooks (ed.), *Was the Industrial Revolution Really Necessary?* (Routledge 1994), p. 25.

⁵⁵¹ P. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of England* (Croom Helm 1984), Chapter 5.

Committee of Council on Education.⁵⁵² That enterprise eventually failed because of lack of finance.

Ludlow Poor Law Union minute the purchase of 'Irish Books'.⁵⁵³ The 'Irish books' were produced by a Board of Commissioners administering Ireland's elementary education system. The Commission was composed of Protestants and Catholics and produced books that schools from both religious traditions were prepared to use. By 1850 they had published forty-one books, consisting of readers, and manuals on vocational subjects. While these books were criticised for being secular, they were secular only by comparison to their predecessors. Goldstrom describes them as 'superficially secular, (they) sprang from a Christian culture and were permeated by Christian ethics'.⁵⁵⁴

In the 'Fifth Book of Lessons' the creation of the Earth is described as 4,000 B.C., though there is a reference to the Earth before the Biblical Creation. The idea of God apportioning people's station in life is replaced by rich and poor created by the laws of political economy and society, and that a division between poor and rich is indispensable to society's wellbeing. The sanctity of private property and 'knowing your place' was still very important but justified by an economic system supported by God.⁵⁵⁵ In England the Irish books were marketed cheaply and were introduced into elementary and workhouse schools by the Committee of Council on Education.⁵⁵⁶ Symons recommended the Irish Books to Shropshire Unions.⁵⁵⁷ The South East

⁵⁵² J. Goldstrom, *The Social Context of Education* (Irish University Press 1972), p. 132.

⁵⁵³ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 2 June 1853, p. 293.

⁵⁵⁴ J. Goldstrom, *The Social Context of Education* (Irish University Press 1972), pp. 67 – 68.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 71 -75.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 137.

⁵⁵⁷ SA: PL 10/5, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1850 – 1859, 11 July 1851, p. 77; SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 2 June 1853, p. 293.

Shropshire District School bought Irish Books, in preference to books by other publishers such as S.P.C.K.⁵⁵⁸

James Kay, the advocate of industrial training, wrote this in a Poor Law Commission report (referring to the pauper child as 'it') 'it must be trained in industry, in correct moral habits, and in religion; and must be fitted to discharge its duties in life.'⁵⁵⁹

It seems clear that Guardians and workhouse teachers used workhouse schools for the purpose of educating children but placed limits on that education by designing it to exercise social control. In the education of more than a few children a degree of order is required and an acceptance of the controlling role of the teacher.

Workhouse schools, though, did more than that by placing constraints on children's learning by variously not teaching writing or geography or as even Whitmore decided, to provide only rudimentary academic education, even though there were almost certain to be pupils who despite their background, would have excelled at academic subjects. Whitmore and Garland saw their role as providing their charges with a good choice of achieving employment after their time at school. Giving those children a fresh start away from the workhouse and connecting the curriculum to preparation for future work meant that Quatt School was successful in those terms.

A reliance on Anglicanism as a means of reinforcing societal roles was also evidence of social control. However just as workhouse schools mirrored much that occurred in schools of the religious societies, their social control was also similar to elementary schools. Gardner shows, however, in his analysis of working-class schools independent of the religious societies that alternative regimes were possible.

⁵⁵⁸ TNA: MH 27/77, Poor Law Administration Department, South East Shropshire School District, 1849 – 1853, 31 December 1851, 28 September 1853.

⁵⁵⁹ Parliamentary Papers 1837 – 1838, James Kay, *Poor Law Commission Fourth Report*, XXVIII, p. 290.

Summary

Most pauper children relied on out-relief, and while that meant the preservation of their family life and local relationships it removed from them the opportunity of workhouse education. In the sphere of education outdoor pauper children were effectively non-persons until Denison's Act and Shropshire Unions made ineffectual use of the provisions of that Act. However the quality of education in at least one Shropshire Union school outshone local elementary schools.

The story of workhouse schools in Shropshire is generally an account of progress. Shropshire Unions were formed in the late 1830s and were the responsibility of Boards of Guardians who were generally inexperienced at organising schools and in some cases dubious of workhouse education as a concept. Uncertain as to the value of pauper education they tended to appoint unqualified staff, and even paupers, as teachers, and paid them poorly. Workhouse teachers had poor conditions of service. Into the 1840s and 1850s a hierarchy of workhouse schools developed with Atcham, Ludlow and Bridgnorth (Quatt) in the lead by recognising the value of education and paying better teachers' salaries, while the progress of other Unions stalled. The inadequate education was generally found in small unions where paying good salaries to teachers appeared to be an expensive luxury.

A third group of Unions decided to contract out the education of pauper children by paying for them to be educated at other pauper schools, such as Atcham and particularly Quatt (part of the Bridgnorth Union). By 1871 Quatt had a roll of 190, and educated pupils from Bridgnorth, Cleobury Mortimer, Madeley, Newport, Shifnal and

Seisdon (Staffordshire).⁵⁶⁰ The eventually well-staffed Quatt School was separate from the workhouse, which improved teachers' conditions of service, and offered relatively good teachers' pay and was successful in enabling pupils to find employment after leaving school.

Quatt was aided in its success by the actions of William Wolryche Whitmore, who was the Chairman of Bridgnorth Guardians, the advent of the Committee of Council on Education Inspection regime, and Jelinger Symons, the Education Inspector, and good quality teachers like Henry Garland.

⁵⁶⁰ *Census of England and Wales 1871, Residents of South East Shropshire Union Workhouse.*

Chapter 5

Medical Services in Shropshire Poor Law Unions

The clientele that the post-1834 Poor Law system served was certain to need a range of services and one of those services was medical assistance. Many breadwinners lost their ability to earn sufficient money for their families if they became ill, and therefore could not afford the costs associated with illness, such as doctor's fees and medicine. The old and the young, a substantial section of the poor law system clientele, were those parts of the population which were and still are most likely to need medical care. Many poor people did not need permanent help but required it to enable them to return to their livelihood and hence support themselves and their family.

Poverty itself was a major contributor to ill health, because the poor were unable to afford a nutritious diet, sound accommodation, and regular medical care that might prevent minor illnesses became major illnesses. Sickness itself is also a significant cause of poverty. The central issues examined by the secondary literature are the quality of medical provision during the Old Poor Law, the quality of New Poor Law provision, the comparison between the two and examination of specific cities, towns and regions. Within that broad characterisation, Shave, Price and Flinn emphasise the post-1834 drive to curtail expenditure on Poor Law Health provision and its inevitable negative impact on the work of Medical Officers. Tomkins, Stringer and Levene *et al* write specifically about the Old Poor Law medical provision. Digby, Loudon and Hamlin explore the difficulties and development of medical professionals

engaged in Poor Law medicine. Marland, Negrine and Williams have written about provincial poor law medicine, as have Siena, Green and Boulton *et al* regarding London.

Michael Flinn has written an analysis of medical services within the New Poor Law. The treatment of illness was never a problem for the rich or fairly comfortable because they could afford medical care.⁵⁶¹ In the mid-nineteenth century that care may not have always cured the patient but the poor could not afford the medical care anyway. For the poor sickness was a problem because wages were often too low to allow a subscription to a medical club either. Medical clubs were subscribed to by well-paid workers.

In the midlands, the south and the east, parishes sometimes paid for a medical officer under the Old Poor Law. Despite this antecedent the Poor Law Amendment Act scarcely mentioned the idea of medical relief for the poor, consumed as it was with concern over the able-bodied, but despite this Union medical relief was established throughout the country. The key figure in the Union medical structure was the District Medical Officer who engaged personally with patients, referred to him by the Relieving Officer. The District Medical Officer was often poorly paid and it was a job suited to a young medical man at the start of his career, or someone with a private practice already.⁵⁶² The Union medical provision both within the workhouse infirmary and via the District Medical Officer was poorly funded.

Price writes about medical negligence in the New Poor Law from 1834 to 1900, and he describes District Medical Officers and Workhouse Medical Officers as the

⁵⁶¹ M. Flinn, 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law' included in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976).

⁵⁶² *Ibid*, p.50.

paramount figures in the medical relief system.⁵⁶³ He develops the case made by Flinn that the Poor Law Medical Service was underfunded, resulting in adverse consequences. Medical Officers were qualified, but they were contracted part-time and underpaid. By part-time he means that many Poor Law Medical Officers had private practices at the same time as their Poor Law duties. The impact of these 'impotent employment arrangements' was considerable, and here he disagrees with Loudon and Digby, and felt that they underestimated that impact.⁵⁶⁴ The Medical Officers' divided loyalties made it difficult for them to perform their poor law duties well. Neglect of patients was the near inevitable result of those working conditions. Reinarz and Schwarz' book bridges the gap between the Old and the New Poor Law and in its eleven discrete chapters it offers work from experts in the field, using workhouses as the common theme.⁵⁶⁵ Siena writes of eighteenth century London workhouses being 'medicalised' to meet the needs of inmates.⁵⁶⁶ Tomkins has used working-class biographies to examine inmates' medical experiences in workhouses.⁵⁶⁷ Those biographies provide personal evidence of the people whom the medical service treated. However, that personal evidence is not always available for verification and was written predominantly by men. The biographies are also generally written in retrospect which has implications for truthful memories, particularly of childhood, and for the workhouse experience to be amalgamated into the success or failure of later life, rather than viewed separately. Despite these

⁵⁶³ K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 12.

⁵⁶⁵ J. Reinarz and Leonard Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013).

⁵⁶⁶ K. Siena, 'Contagion, Exclusion, and the Unique Medical World of the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse: London Infirmarys in Their Widest Relief', in J. Reinarz and L. Schwarz, (eds.) *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013), pp. 19 - 39. Siena used the word 'medicalised' on p. 19.

⁵⁶⁷ A. Tomkins, 'Workhouse Medical Care from Working-Class Autobiographies, 1750 – 1834', Reinarz and Schwarz, (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013).

caveats Tomkins writes that the biographies show a generally neutral or positive view of workhouse medical care. The question that remains, considering Kim Price's work, is whether that neutral or positive view translated easily into the New Poor Law.

In a local context, Samantha Shave's chapter on the Bridgwater Union considers issues that also concern other writers, such as Flinn, Digby and Price.⁵⁶⁸ The Bridgwater Guardians appeared to have been motivated by, above all, keeping a very tight medical budget at the cost of providing adequate medical services. They were aware of the cost of appointing qualified doctors and decided that a medical qualification was not a necessary prerequisite to being appointed as Medical Officer. The Guardians also used nurses and midwives as surrogate Medical Officers, and told Relieving Officers not to send sick paupers to the Medical Officers. One unqualified Medical Officer was convicted of malpractice by the Assize Court but then re-appointed by the Union.⁵⁶⁹

One of the issues surrounding the first decades of the new poor law was whether health care was better then than during the Old Poor Law period. Stringer investigates the issue of how the relatively organised medicine in Northamptonshire during the Old Poor Law operated alongside more traditional practices and fringe practitioners.⁵⁷⁰ Considering the decline of traditional medicine, Porter (1992) argues that 'official or charitable medical provision was an important factor in the decline of magic medicine and the marginalisation of wise women and cunning men'.⁵⁷¹

Levene, Reinartz and Williams examine the health care of children in the eighteenth

⁵⁶⁸ S. Shave, 'Immediate Death or a Life of Torture Are the Consequences of the System: The Bridgwater Union Scandal and Policy Change', Reinartz and Schwarz, (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013), pp. 164 - 191.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 176.

⁵⁷⁰ A. Stringer, 'Depth and Diversity in Parochial Healthcare: Northamptonshire 1750 – 1830', *Family & Community History*, Vol 9/1, May 2006, pp. 43 – 54.

⁵⁷¹ R. Porter (ed.), 'The Patient in England c.1600 – 1800', in Wear, A (ed.), *Medicine in Society*, (Cambridge University Press).

century. They show that children were admitted to the hospitals whose records they researched and that some were under the age of seven and not necessarily surgical or emergency cases.⁵⁷² In addition hospitals of the period engaged with the sick child at home and in community care, and sometimes treated children as out-patients. However, the children who used a hospital tended to be local to the town and not from the hinterland, showing an urban/rural divide in health care. Issues examined in this article about provision of health care, medical specialising and the role of the family and community were still significant for poor children from 1834 to 1870.

Digby's book is largely about economics - the economics of medical practice.⁵⁷³ It is about medical entrepreneurs, and doctors surviving in a competitive world. As with Loudon, she describes the competition for general practitioner income during the nineteenth century, and competition for custom with the 'irregulars' and voluntary hospitals. The successful general practitioners, she argues, were those who obtained a middle-class practice with outside appointments as extra income. She concludes that practitioners increasingly viewed themselves as a profession dedicated to healing, rather than just a commercial operation.

Examining similar issues, one of Loudon's points in his book is the fact that doctors in the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century were competitors in the market place for goods and services.⁵⁷⁴ One way to garner income was to sell medicines, which resulted in the late eighteenth century in the rise of druggists. The post-1834 Poor Law Medical Officers were poorly paid by comparison with those with

⁵⁷² A. Levene, J. Reinartz and A. Williams, 'Child Patients, Hospitals and the Home in Eighteenth-century England', *Family & Community History*, Vol 15/1, (April 2012), pp. 15 - 33.

⁵⁷³ A. Digby, *Making a medical living: doctors and patients in the English market for medicine, 1720 – 1911* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵⁷⁴ I. Loudon, *Medical Care and the General Practitioner, 1740 – 1850* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986); 'Medical practitioners 1750 - 1850 and the period of medical reform in Britain', included in A. Wear, (ed.), *Medicine in Society, Historical essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

private medical income, but the Unions provided opportunities for young practitioners or those who did not thrive in the medical market place.

In Loudon's view the advent of the New Poor Law caused a reduction in the number of publicly paid Medical Officers for the poor. Loudon recounts examples of areas of the country in which there was a marked reduction in the number of Medical Officers for the poor after 1834. The result was considerable workload for Union Medical Officers. As well as workload and low pay they had to provide their own drugs and dressings. In addition rural Unions were large in area and medical officers sometimes had to travel long distances to patients.

Despite this Loudon regards the end of the eighteenth century and the first sixty years of the nineteenth century as a period of medical reform, characterised and made possible by the growth of medical education and professional unity. He still laments the wasted opportunity of the Poor Law Amendment Act, which could have heralded good medical treatment for the poor 'but parsimony and prejudice against poverty produced a miserable and inadequate system'.⁵⁷⁵

Hamlin writes about the advances made in public health during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷⁶ He analyses Chadwick's vision of public health and public works creating a system of sanitation and safe drinking water. The *sine qua non* of that improvement of public health infrastructure was the rise of science (particularly epidemiology and bacteriology) allied to a democratic and bureaucratic state. Both science and bureaucracy support each other in a rational nation-state.

⁵⁷⁵ I. Loudon, *Medical Care and the General Practitioner, 1740 – 1850* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986); 'Medical practitioners 1750 - 1850 and the period of medical reform in Britain', included in A. Wear, p. 245.

⁵⁷⁶ C. Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick, Britain, 1800 – 1854* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Hamlin implies that Chadwick's pursuance of public health was in part revenge against the Poor Law Commission and the Government which had humiliated him. One of the principles of the New Poor Law was, by using the deterrent power of the workhouse, to force potential welfare claimants to engage with the labour market at any wage level. Requiring the poor to live on below-subsistence wages was likely to foster disease which could affect the whole population. Providing services to the poor did not foster independence but may have prevented disease. Chadwick, never a die-hard supporter of Malthus' population theory, saw disease largely as a result of poor management, remediable by rational action. Some medical men of Chadwick's time knew that cold, poor diet, poor housing, inadequate clothing and misery could produce disease. Hodgkinson also writes that the workhouse was an effective place to spread disease.⁵⁷⁷

Under the influence of Malthus and the political economists engaged in reform of the Old Poor Law, the 'necessaries of life' – food, warmth, clothing and shelter ceased to be viewed as true necessities for all.⁵⁷⁸ Hamlin argues that the rationale for this change of view was the inequality caused by industrialisation and the generation of wealth. If inequality was a sign of a healthy economy then biological equality was not an acceptable premise.

There was a 'war' between doctors and economists over necessities and this was fought after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Hamlin writes that the economists won in England but there was an indeterminate result in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In England Hamlin views the battle as being fought between the Poor Law

⁵⁷⁷ R. G. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service* (The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, London 1967), p. 451.

⁵⁷⁸ C. Hamlin, 'The 'Necessaries of Life' in British Political Medicine, 1750-1850,' *Journal of Consumer Policy* 29 (2006): pp. 373-97

Commission (influenced by Chadwick until 1842) and the Union Medical Officers. Chadwick de-professionalised them by placing bureaucrats (Relieving Officers) in a position to control access to medical care whilst the tendering system kept District Medical Officers' salaries low. The Commission also disapproved of the use of food and drink 'necessaries' being prescribed to poor patients who suffered generally from a poor diet. The necessities of individual lives were then replaced by structural features such as sanitation.

Marland focuses on the medical history of Huddersfield and Wakefield, the former a vibrant industrial town, and the latter more genteel.⁵⁷⁹ Using extensive primary sources she describes and analyses the totality of the health experience in those two towns. Her work is connected with that of Loudon in her description of the medical marketplace, and the striving for respectability both as medical practitioners and as professionals. Respectability came to Wakefield, but proved largely elusive in Huddersfield.

Negrine's thesis is a study of Leicester Poor Law Medical Services from 1867 – 1914, and her articles examine the treatment of sick children in Leicester Union during the same period.⁵⁸⁰ The Leicester workhouse was large and housed 1,000 inmates. Children lived there from 1851 (when it was built) until 1867, when they moved to separate accommodation, including sick wards. A Local Government Board Inspection was concerned at the number of children who became sick ward patients and this was considered to be the result of poor heating in dormitories, bad sanitation,

⁵⁷⁹ H. Marland, *Medicine and society in Wakefield and Huddersfield 1780 – 1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁵⁸⁰ A. Negrine, 'The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867 – 1914', *Family & Community History*, Vol. 13/1, May 2010, pp. 34 -44; A. Negrine, 'Medicine and Poverty: A Study of the Poor Law Medical Services of the Leicester Union, 1867 – 1914', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2008; A. Negrine, 'Practitioners and Paupers: Medicine at the Leicester Union Workhouse, 1867 – 1905', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (University of Rochester Press, 2013).

lack of fresh air and exercise. Initially, it seems that Guardians were not zealous in dealing with these problems. After a severe measles epidemic and under pressure from the Local Government Board, the Guardians boarded out orphans and deserted children. In 1844 the Guardians built cottage homes for children, but the poor health of the children continued. The water supply was found to be contaminated and was replaced.

The immediate conclusion that can be drawn from this literature is that illness was yet another problem for the poor. Inadequate diet and housing combined with unaffordable health care exacerbated their difficulties. The care provided by the New Poor Law was underfunded and Bridgwater Union is an example of a Union seeking to provide a cheap medical service. In some parts of the county fewer doctors were employed by the New Poor Law than in the Old. Doctors struggled to enhance their professionalism and this was made more difficult for Poor Law Medical Officers by their subservience to Relieving Officers.

These books and articles highlight many of the issues surrounding the health care of poor children. The Old Poor Law in Northamptonshire is described by Stringer in positive terms. Also, other writers of eighteenth century history such as Snell and Tomkins show that the Old Poor Law was viewed positively by patients. Negrine's work on the period after 1867 shows a time of change, with living arrangements for children being improved, and workhouse infirmaries undergoing a general upgrade, materially and in status. The period between 1834 and 1870 is positioned between the patchy generosity of the Old Poor Law and the post-1867 reform culture. During the middle (1834 – 1870) period, though, there were large numbers of children

seeking relief, either as lone children, or a part of a family, and over half the workhouse population were children, and needed health care.

Framing the Question

During this period the Poor Law Authorities, both national and local, had to provide new solutions to old problems and had to reconcile the demands of a punitive poor law, with a need and desire to provide care for those who were ill. In that context this chapter will provide answers to some important questions. Did Shropshire Poor Law Unions appoint District Medical Officers early on after being constituted, and did they appoint such men with good qualifications? Bearing in mind that Unions were composed of many parishes and sometimes small towns, were District Medical Officers appointed to coherent geographical areas, to avoid unnecessary time delays? What was the quality of care for out-relief patients? Aside from the duty to provide food and shelter for paupers, did Shropshire Workhouse managers make good use of their facilities to provide good medical care for both children and adults, and did the Guardians and their medical officers exhibit a sense of care about sick paupers, particularly children? In the context of the last question did Guardians or Workhouse Masters acknowledge Medical Officers' increasing professionalism and did Guardians and other officers support the work of medical officers. Historians of New Poor Law medical provisions write negatively about Guardians' lack of resolve to fund medical care properly with the resultant lack of professionalism of Union Medical Officers. Is it possible to recognise these scenarios in Shropshire Unions?

To answer these questions this chapter will consist of four sections. District Medical Officers were key figures in the provision of New Poor Law health care and firstly, the

characteristics of Medical Districts and District Medical Officers, including their method of appointment, will be examined. Secondly, the District Medical Officers' treatment of patients will be analysed, followed by the value of workhouse infirmaries, and the Shropshire Unions' relationship with outside medical agencies.

Medical Districts and District Medical Officers

The structure of medical districts was the responsibility of the separate Boards of Guardians. The shape and size of districts was important in providing a good medical service, because a district that was particularly large or populous or of a linear shape would create difficulties for sick paupers, because of the distances involved, or the Medical Officer: Patient ratio.

The Poor Law Medical Surgeons Association regarded the District Medical Officer concept as a method of making access to health care difficult.⁵⁸¹ If it was difficult for the Medical Officer to reach patients, or *vice-versa*, in a reasonably short time, then the care of the patient could be compromised.

In 1842 the Poor Law Commission responded to such concerns by requiring that districts should not exceed 15,000 acres or have a population of over 10,000. Wem Union, which was a small rural Union with an equally small market town, organised three medical districts, with populations of 4,491, 4,279 and 2,577, the two largest of which carried a salary of £50 each with the smallest carrying a salary of £45.⁵⁸²

Therefore Wem Union districts were well below the population maximum defined by the Poor Law Commission, but featured a well-dispersed population.

⁵⁸¹ R. Hodgkinson, 'Poor Law Medical Officers of England 1834 – 1871', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1956, Volume XI, Number 3, p. 305.

⁵⁸² SA: PL 15/1, Wem Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 8 March 1837, p. 63.

The ability to reach a Medical Officer, or for a Medical Officer to meet a sick pauper would have been worse in the south of Shropshire, not only because of a sparse population but also because of very hilly terrain. In the 1840s Ludlow Union re-organised medical districts. The new districts were very unequal in size and the Union justified that by noting the difficult terrain the Medical Officers had to negotiate. The new districts were demarcated by rivers and hill ranges.

Method of Appointment

The Poor Law Commission left selection of Medical Officers and their pay to Guardians. At first, a widely-used method was that of tendering in which Unions described a Medical Officer post, either managing a District involving travel between parishes, or managing the sick in a workhouse, and invited applicants to tender for it. If the Unions received a low and a high tender for a post the money became a consideration if the quality of practitioner could not be judged. Thus a Medical Officer willing to perform duties at £50 per annum may have been likely to receive the job in preference to a candidate tendering £60.⁵⁸³

Ludlow Union used a tendering system in appointing their first medical officers in 1836. At their first meeting on 18 July 1836 they organised the Union into four districts. 'The duties of the Medical Officers shall extend to affording medical and surgical assistance and medicine and all appliances (except trusses) to all such poor persons.'⁵⁸⁴ The Guardians did not expect Medical Officers to assist with childbirth, preferring the cheaper midwife, but if they were needed in the case of difficult

⁵⁸³ R. Hodgkinson, 'Poor Law Medical Officers of England 1834 – 1871', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1956, Volume XI, Number 3, p. 301.

⁵⁸⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/1, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1838, 18 July 1836, p. 9.

pregnancies, 10s. 6d. would be their payment. At the first Guardians' meeting they arranged to advertise the Medical Officers' posts and at the next meeting the tenders for the posts were considered. There was a measure of competition with five tenders for four posts. As a result of that competition Mr. Valentine's tender of £100 for the first district was turned down and he reduced it to £80 at which his application was accepted. He also undercut Mr. Meynott by offering to work the second district also for £80, instead of Meynott's tender of £90. The Guardians were perhaps influenced overmuch by cost in these appointments because in later years they decided that two Districts were too much for one man and thereafter only appointed Medical Officers to single districts.

The weaknesses of that tendering system was that it drove down medical salaries, and it allowed men with large private practices to bid for the post and use the service of an assistant to perform the task, although it appears from Guardian Minutes from Shropshire Unions that while some Unions' appointees were indeed in private practice they did not use substitutes except when ill.

The system of tendering was a bone of contention between Unions and Medical Officers and the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association and was rescinded in 1842. Hodgkinson writes that the Poor Law Commission came to realise the importance of New Poor Law medicine but she suggested reforms were contextualised by the need for economy of provision and the increasing confidence of Unions viewing regulations as merely permissive.⁵⁸⁵ Some other Shropshire Unions used a tendering system to appoint Medical Officers. However, Cleobury Mortimer, Wem, Drayton and Shifnal all advertised at fixed salaries and made appointments at

⁵⁸⁵ R. Hodgkinson, 'Poor Law Medical Officers of England 1834 – 1871', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1956, Volume XI, Number 3, p. 302.

those salaries.⁵⁸⁶ Price shows that imaginative Boards of Guardians could circumvent the appointment rules to keep Medical Officers' salaries low.⁵⁸⁷

When the system of payment was no longer by tender, salaries remained low, and in the country's Unions salaries were calculated differently, with some paid a fixed salary, some salaries were assessed by number of paupers and some were assessed by the number of cases dealt with.

The Poor Law Commission required that the Medical Officers employed by the Poor Law Unions be qualified. The medical profession argued that Union Medical Officers should possess two qualifications and be registered as both apothecaries and surgeons, but the Poor Law Commission required only one qualification. The Ludlow Guardians, committed to cheap health care but mindful of its importance to sick paupers, questioned the value of apothecary qualifications. In 1838 the Guardians had concerns about medical qualifications, particularly in relation to apothecaries being appointed as medical officers. On 7 May that year they discussed the matter and by a majority of 12 to 1 decided that being an apothecary was not sufficient qualification to be a Union Medical Officer.⁵⁸⁸ Unfortunately this principled stand was undermined by the Poor Law Commissioners when William Day, an Assistant Commissioner, wrote to the Guardians stating that apothecaries were indeed qualified to be Medical Officers.⁵⁸⁹ Pressure from the medical profession resulted in the requirement of two qualifications to be established in 1842, in the General Medical

⁵⁸⁶ SA: PL 5/1, Cleobury Mortimer Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1838, 14 July 1836, p. 3; PL 15/1, Wem Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1848, 8 March 1837, p. 63; PL 13/3, Shifnal Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 17 June 1836, p. 50; PL 7/6, Drayton Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 17 October 1863, p. 7.

⁵⁸⁷ K. Price, *Medical negligence in Victorian Britain: the crisis of care under the English Poor Law, c1834 – 1900* (Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 28 – 29.

⁵⁸⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/1, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1838, 7 May 1838, p. 378.

⁵⁸⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/1, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1838, 14 May 1838, p. 383.

Order.⁵⁹⁰ The Ludlow Guardians, by questioning the medical knowledge of apothecaries with no other qualification, were taking a positive view of Medical Officers professionalism, at least at that stage.

Some Shropshire Medical Officers were attached full or part-time to workhouses but most District Medical Officers were attached to districts that were theoretically compact enough to enable patients and District Medical officers to meet for a consultation without undue travelling. A District Medical Officer without Workhouse responsibility was required to treat all sick paupers within their district and supply (out of his own pocket) the drugs necessary for his patients.⁵⁹¹ The District Medical Officer was required to treat only those patients referred to him by the local Relieving Officer. Thus a non-medical man was engaged in deciding whether sick paupers could see the Medical Officer.⁵⁹²

The problem for patients was that when they were sick they had to make a journey to the Relieving Officer in order to receive permission to visit the District Medical Officer or to have the District Medical Officer to visit them, with no reason to suppose that the patient, Relieving Officer and the District Medical Officer lived or worked near each other, particularly in a predominantly rural county such as Shropshire.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ R. Hodgkinson, 'Poor Law Medical Officers of England 1834 – 1871', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1956, Volume XI, Number 3, p. 301.

⁵⁹¹ M. Flinn, 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law', included in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976), p. 49.

⁵⁹² R. Griffin, *Statement of the Grievances of the Poor Law Medical Officers* (Isha Books, 2013).

⁵⁹³ M. Flinn, 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law' included in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976), p. 49.

Treatment of Patients

There are limited remaining records of Shropshire Medical Officers and their interaction with patients, but there are some medical record books from the 1840s and 1850s from Ludlow Union. These are from the Stokesay and Ludlow Districts, allowing a snapshot of doctor/patient dealings in both a rural and an urban environment. These show a high degree of commitment from the Medical Officers involved, as indicated by their frequent visits to patients.

John Jones was the District Medical Officer for the Stokesay District of the Ludlow Union. In the period between April 1841 and December 1842 he treated a wide range of children's illnesses.⁵⁹⁴ The most prevalent was rubeola (measles) which tended to be contracted by all the children in the family. Beyond that, fever and vermes (worms) were also prevalent. Scarletina, jaundice, pneumonia, whooping cough, stomach ailments, cuts and fractures and bronchitis were also constant problems. Medical Officer Jones generally visited patients once or twice a week but on some occasions visited more often than that. Fourteen year old Richard Hotchkis, who suffered from rheumatic fever, was visited by Jones on 5 consecutive days, and then once or twice a week thereafter. Anne Burgoyne, a 10 month old child was visited on 7 consecutive days, and a two year old, John Langford, suffering from pneumonia, was visited on four consecutive days before he died. The impression is of a hard-working, committed District Medical Officer who supported his patients.

District Medical Officer John Southern's medical returns of 1847 contain similar illnesses to those of Jones' returns, though there were more young children suffering

⁵⁹⁴ SA: PL 9/28/1/1, Ludlow Medical Officers' Record Book, 1841 – 1842.

from ophthalmia.⁵⁹⁵ Ophthalmia was often associated with pregnant women suffering from gonorrhoea and then passing it on to their babies. Southern only reports on treatment on one occasion in which he prescribed beef and rice to a family in which parents and children were ill. He clearly decided that the whole family needed a better diet in order to become healthy.

There are two more Medical Weekly Return books dated 1847 and 1853 that have survived and they were completed by Henry Meynott who was the District Medical Officer for the Ludlow district, which would have included the town of Ludlow.⁵⁹⁶

Similarly to John Jones, Meynott visited families on six days a week when he considered it necessary.⁵⁹⁷ For one of those families he prescribed mutton, tea and sugar in an attempt to use nourishing food to clear up the illness or illnesses.⁵⁹⁸

Meynott also offered specifically mutton or 'nourishing food' as a treatment on many occasions.⁵⁹⁹ Another family he visited 6 times a week had three children of 5, 3 and 1 suffering from smallpox. The most prevalent diagnosis by Henry Meynott was 'gastric' with rare cases of diarrhoea and dysentery listed separately. The second most prevalent diagnosis in Meynott's records was 'pectoral/bronchial' which probably included a range of chest infections.

The most significant difference between Jones' list of ailments and those of Meynott's is the latter's inclusion of many cases of smallpox, occurring very often in children under 5 years old. 'Eruptive' was noted frequently, probably indicating a range of skin eruptions and as a diagnosis occurred in children of all ages. 'Pormigo'

⁵⁹⁵ SA: PL 9/28/1/2, Ludlow Medical Officers' Record Book, 1842, p. 209.

⁵⁹⁶ SA: PL 9/28/1/3, Ludlow Medical Officers' Record Book, 1851 - 1855; PL 9/28/1/4, 1853.

⁵⁹⁷ SA: PL 9/28/1/4, Ludlow Medical Officers' Record Book, June/July 1851, July 1851, September 1851, May 1853, July 1853, August 1853 (7 days a week), May/June 1854, August 1854, September 1854, April 1855, June 1855.

⁵⁹⁸ SA: PL 9/28/1/3, Ludlow Medical Officers' Record Book, 1851 - 1855, 29 June - 5 July 1851.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, June/July 1851, July 1851, September 1851, September 1854, June 1855.

(impetigo) was diagnosed by Jones and Southern but not by Meynott so perhaps that was subsumed into 'eruptive'.

In workhouses of the 1830s and 1850s (the same period as the District Medical Officer Weekly Medical Returns) the main skin complaint amongst children was the 'itch' (scabies) but that illness is not mentioned in any of the Weekly Returns by the three District Medical Officers. Perhaps the illness was not prevalent in either rural or urban areas in the Ludlow Union or was diagnosed as 'eruptive'. Alternatively, the 'itch' was perhaps a particularly and peculiarly institutional problem, only found in the close confines of the workhouse.

District Medical Officer Jones completed two separate returns analysing his interaction with patients and both were sent to the Union Clerk to be signed off. The 'Medical Return' describes only patients and illnesses, but the 'Register of Sickness and Mortality' also described the treatment prescribed for the patient's illnesses. The most prolific treatment used in the treatment column was 'general' and this was predominantly prescribed for 'fever', though also for rheumatism, scarlatina, rubeola and dysentery. It may be that 'general' meant simply bedrest and an enhanced diet, leaving the body to cure itself, and the illnesses prescribed 'general' were almost all described as cured, but there were some exceptions. A child of 9 months with pneumonia was prescribed 'general' and died, as did a 7 year old with scarlatina, and a 2 year old with dysentery.

Medical certificates signed by the generality of Ludlow Union District Medical Officers show extensive use of meat and alcohol prescribed to ill patients.⁶⁰⁰ It may be that the word 'general' was a euphemism for prescribed mutton and wine given to pauper

⁶⁰⁰ SA: PL 9/28/6/1, Medical Certificates, PL 9/28/6/2, Medical Certificates, PL 9/28/6/3, Medical Certificates.

families to help them combat illness. Meat and alcohol was paid for by the Union whereas other medicines were paid for by the District Medical Officers. Thus meat, alcohol and bed rest could be described as 'general' remedies whereas purgatives and astringents were regarded as 'particular' remedies. 'Antiphlogistic' (anti-inflammatory) was generally prescribed for pneumonia and bronchitis, though on one occasion an epispastic (blistering agent) was prescribed.⁶⁰¹ Eight child pneumonia cases were diagnosed, of which six survived the disease and the treatment. Of the two children who died of pneumonia, one was prescribed 'antiphlogistic' and one prescribed 'general'. Vermes (worms) were treated by purgatives as were two cases of jaundice, and a case of constipation.⁶⁰² Tonic was prescribed for dyspepsia and for a 15 year old boy suffering from irritability. Dyspepsia was also treated with an 'antacid'.⁶⁰³ Pertussis (whooping cough) was treated with an emetic (causes vomiting) and 'diarrhoea' and 'chemosis' (conjunctivitis) were treated with an astringent (agent that contracts body tissues) as was a 'prolapsus'.⁶⁰⁴ A child of 6 months was prescribed with a truss to cure his hernia (possibly a rectal hernia).⁶⁰⁵

Unfortunately, Medical Record Books are unavailable for all Shropshire Unions except Ludlow and even they are only available for 1841, 1842, 1847 and 1853 and only for one specific Medical Officer in each year. In consequence it is impossible to judge whether the Ludlow Medical Officer experience was similar to Medical Officers from other Unions. Judging from the experience of Medical Officer John Jones' Record Book he showed strong commitment to patients by visiting them on several

⁶⁰¹ SA: PL 9/28/4/1, Medical Officers' Record Book, 26 March 1840, 25 December 1846, 25 March 1847.

⁶⁰² Ibid, 26 March 1840, 25 June 1841.

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 25 March 1843.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 25 September 1842.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 25 June 1841.

consecutive days. The same commitment is true of Medical Officer Henry Meynott who visited his patients often.

There is also a clear mismatch between the treatment described in the Record Books and the medical certificates written by Ludlow Medical Officers, of which hundreds exist.⁶⁰⁶ The vast majority of these certificates show liberal use of meat, flour and alcohol prescribed to patients. This was obviously an attempt to bolster the health of poor families with ill members, when either useful drugs were unavailable or too expensive for Medical Officers to purchase. There are one or two mentions of meat being prescribed in the Record Books but not on a scale suggested by the extant medical certificates. 'General' was probably a description of enhanced diet.

Workhouse Infirmarys – the Shropshire experience

Most Shropshire Unions already had infirmary accommodation in the 1830s or built some when they built new workhouses, but the quality of that provision was very variable. Ludlow built anew in 1838 and included infirmarys for males and females, together with nurses' accommodation and a surgery.⁶⁰⁷ Ellesmere Union had men's and women's sick wards, itch wards and lying-in wards in 1856 but there are indications that it had an infirmary in 1839⁶⁰⁸ Madeley bought 20 beds in March 1837 with the express purpose of fitting out a 'hospital'.⁶⁰⁹ Shifnal also had sickroom accommodation in 1839 as had Atcham, but Atcham built a new infirmary in 1851.⁶¹⁰ Drayton built a new infirmary in 1851 including isolation wards and when Whitchurch

⁶⁰⁶ SA: PL 9/28/6/1, PL 9/28/6/2, PL 9/28/6/3, Ludlow Union Medical Certificates.

⁶⁰⁷ L. Smith, 'Refuges of Last Resort', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Volume LXXXII 2007, p. 105.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

became a Union in 1854, it already had infirmary accommodation.⁶¹¹ Cleobury Mortimer, Church Stretton and Clun, all rural unions, had written plans for infirmaries, but it is unclear whether they were built.⁶¹² Clun Union had clear plans for an infirmary in 1842, but William Day, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, persuaded the Union to spend its resources on better dining facilities instead.

Regarding infirmaries in the specifically children's workhouses there is little evidence that they existed. There is no mention of them at Gnosall, which was the Newport Union children's house. At Quatt infirmary accommodation is not referred to, and in 1849 when there was an enlargement of the building to accommodate more children, that did not mention an infirmary.⁶¹³ In 1841 William Gilbert, Day's successor reported that there were no sick wards at Ercall Magna, but the Guardians replied that that would be remedied as soon as they bought the building from the High Ercall vestry.⁶¹⁴ However, it is likely that the managers of the children's workhouses at Gnosall, Ercall Magna and Quatt created conditions conducive to health. The children were apart from other inmates with adult diseases; they had an outdoor lifestyle with plenty of exercise and consumed fresh produce from their own market garden.

Starting with no suitable workhouse accommodation the Ludlow Guardians made a good beginning by sending a committee to investigate many aspects of workhouse design, including infirmaries, and they reported back to their colleagues. At a meeting on 20 August 1838 they recommended the purchase of wooden bedsteads that enabled the patient to be propped up and also a framework over the patient's

⁶¹¹ Ibid, p. 103.

⁶¹² Ibid, see pages 88 - 98.

⁶¹³ *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 14 September 1849.

⁶¹⁴ TNA: MH 12/10060, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, William Gilbert to the Poor Law Commission, and William Gilbert to Wellington Union Clerk, November 1841.

head from which a cord could be suspended thus enabling the patient to pull him/herself up to change position. The Minute Book has a drawing of such a bedstead. The surgery was to be fitted with fresh water and a sink.⁶¹⁵

Because of the logistics of regular inspection of all workhouses the Commission and later the Poor Law Board were dependent on the various Union Visiting Committees to be vigilant in medical matters.⁶¹⁶ In the Spring of 1840 the Ludlow Visiting

Committee fulfilled exactly that function. They had visited the workhouse regularly and expressed concern about 'the long continuation and the frequent recurrence of the itch (scabies) among the inmates of the workhouse, particularly the children'.⁶¹⁷

Scabies, also known as 'the itch', was a common medical condition among the poor. It was caused by small parasites, similar to lice, which burrow under the skin and cause severe itching. The condition was often contracted through sharing a bed with an infected individual. However, in many medical institutions there were often two or three to a bed.⁶¹⁸

Mr. Valentine, the Ludlow Workhouse Medical Officer, expressed the view that the cause was 'too many children sleeping together'. The Guardians' response was to order that no more than two persons should sleep in one bed. It is not possible to know how many children slept in a bed in the Ludlow workhouse of 1840, but if a remedy for itch was for no more than two children in a bed, then logically there were usually more than two. Evidence from the fourth week in June 1842 was that in the boys' ward there were 5 double beds and 10 single beds for 30 boys, and 9 doubles

⁶¹⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/2, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1838 – 1840, 20 August 1838, p. 49.

⁶¹⁶ R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service* (The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967), p. 457

⁶¹⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/2, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1838 – 1840, 26 February 1840, p. 186.

⁶¹⁸ Flinn, M., 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law', in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976).

and 4 singles for 29 girls. In the lying-in ward there was one bed per patient, but in the female infirmary there were 2 doubles and 5 singles for 13 patients.

A year later in June 1843 there were 13 beds for 30 boys, and 14 beds for 33 girls. In the lying-in ward there were 2 beds for 6 patients. Up until the end of the Master's Report Book in November 1845 the pattern was the same in the boys' ward with slightly over twice as many boys as beds and approximately the same in the girls' ward. The lying-in ward was sometimes empty, sometimes there was an exact match between beds and patients, but often more patients than beds. In September 1842 there was a measles outbreak amongst children in the House. Girls with measles were placed in the lying-in ward. The male infirmary generally had a good correlation between beds and patients but the female infirmary very often had more patients than beds, particularly in 1843. In March of that year there were 9 beds and 14 patients, but it is important to consider the ratio of beds to people in the context of the living conditions of agricultural workers of the time.⁶¹⁹ Bearing in mind that we are considering living conditions of the poorest people in society, beds would have been shared or children would have slept on a straw pallet on the floor or in bundles of rags in the corner.⁶²⁰ Chadwick's 'Sanitary Report of 1842' compiled evidence from various Poor Law Union Medical Officers of very poor domestic housing standards. On the other hand, the Union had the opportunity to impose high standards of care on itself, if it had the will. In the climate of the times that would have been difficult but not impossible.

⁶¹⁹ SA: PL 9/20/4/1, Ludlow Workhouse Master's Report Book, March 1843.

⁶²⁰ P. Horn, *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* (Macmillan, 1976), pp 23, 24.

To mitigate the spread of scabies the Ludlow schoolmistress was ordered to supervise the children's washing.⁶²¹ Nationally District Medical Officers and Workhouse Medical Officers attempted to assert their professionalism and Mr. Valentine, the Ludlow Workhouse Medical Officer, had a strong sense of professional care for his patients and consistently brought the Ludlow Guardians' attention to medical problems in the workhouse and his suggested solutions. In July 1840 the Guardians' General Purposes Committee discovered that Mr. Valentine still had concerns about preventative measures against the 'itch'. He told the committee that the 'itch' was still breaking out and he thought that the 'irregular manner of the washing of the children' was to blame. He recommended that every Saturday the Master should inspect every boy and the Matron or schoolmistress every girl and sign a certificate to say they had done so, and all those found with the 'itch' should be reported to him. It also transpired in the report that the pipes leading to the children's washing troughs were blocked anyway.

Mr. Valentine, unlike many of the Medical Officers described in Price, had a strong sense of professionalism and continually advocated measures to improve the care of his Workhouse Infirmary patients.⁶²² He had the support of the Guardians when dealing with immediate problems such as particular illnesses but they did not support him if it involved more fundamental structural changes, such as diet improvement. In 1841 the proactive Mr. Valentine came to the conclusion that the workhouse and its infirmary was not a healthy environment and ill children might recover better from illness if living at home with out-relief.

⁶²¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/2, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1838 – 1840, 4 March 1840, p. 186.

⁶²² K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

Anxiety about childhood diseases was evident in April 1841, when an unidentified illness spread among the younger inmates at Ludlow.⁶²³ The General Purpose Committee, with Valentines's support, recommended that the boys who were learning trades should only work at them for four hours at a time and that they attend school for two hours every day. The children should also be taken out for a walk at least three times every week for at least 90 minutes on each occasion. The walk should generally be supervised by the schoolmistress.

Very significant was the tacit acceptance of the committee and presumably Mr. Valentine that the children's health might be improved if they were living in a healthier environment generally, involving fresh air and an absence of other ill people. As a result the Guardians arranged for some children to return to their parishes with out-relief. George Woodhouse from Leintwardine was to be sent back to his home village for a change of air and allowed whatever out-relief was necessary for his health. Mr. Russell, the Berrington District Medical Officer, was asked to supervise the boy's recovery and report back to the Guardians. Richard Brown should 'be attended by some careful person daily in the open air for five or six hours and that he be unreservedly allowed as much and whatever nutritious food as Mr. Valentine . . . may order for him.' Mary Sioux 'be allowed to quit the workhouse with a liberal allowance of out-relief until her foot is healed and she is to apply personally to the Board if she needs more relief. Elizabeth Davis should be employed in the kitchen and allowed to walk in the open air for 2 or 3 hours a day. Mary Ann Boa should go to Wigmore for a change of air, be allowed out relief and Mr. Russell is asked to look after her.' Timothy George of Bitterley was also allowed to leave the House with out-

⁶²³ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 28 April 1841, p. 12.

relief.⁶²⁴ The Commissioners' Official Circular of June 1840 optimistically suggested that very ill people receiving outdoor relief would be 'more quickly cured with the advantages of superior cleanliness' in a workhouse infirmary together with 'superior nursing, dietary and doctoring where possible'.⁶²⁵ 'Where possible' are the significant words in that quotation because 'superior nursing' was almost unknown in the workhouses of the 1830s and 1840s.⁶²⁶

These cases show that in the light of experience the Guardians (presumably encouraged by Valentine) recognised that the workhouse could be an unhealthy place and they took the logical step of allowing some children to go home, with outdoor relief. Despite that, however, the report of the General Purposes Committee tried to be reassuring by concluding that the workhouse diet was good, the inmates were generally healthy and no diseases existed in the house. They argued that the current childhood illnesses were the consequence of children being admitted to the house with ailments. To use a medical metaphor, this shows the Guardians' willingness to deal with the symptoms of a problem, without taking a more radical course by confronting some of the causes of workhouse illnesses, which were issues such as inappropriate diet, overcrowding in the infirmary and the building's structural faults. In June 1841 there was an unusual item in the list of invoices, - Mr. Valentine presented a £34. 7s. 8d. bill for groceries. This is additional to the usual official bills for groceries, which might indicate that he was intent on improving the sick inmates' diet irrespective of the General Purposes Committee and the Workhouse Master. Mr. Valentine also recommended to the Guardians that there be a new Sick Diet

⁶²⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 28 April 1841, p. 12.

⁶²⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 8 June 1842, pp. 148, 149.

⁶²⁶ M. Flinn, 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976), p. 56; and R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service* (The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967), p. 165.

introduced for inmates who were ill. He was asked to prepare it in detail and his proposals were presented to the Guardians' meeting of 7 July 1841 but were deferred. The sick Dietary was placed on the agenda for the next nine consecutive Guardians' Meetings, but on every occasion it was deferred, ostensibly because of other pressing business. Clearly the Guardians did not wish to discuss it. Presumably if Valentine's advice was to improve the diet in the infirmary they may have found it difficult to reject clear medical advice. They may also have felt that improving the infirmary diet would have implications for the general workhouse diet.⁶²⁷ After deferment on 24 November the sick dietary was never mentioned again. By that stage it was clear that the relationship between Valentine and the Guardians was at a very low ebb. The Medical Officer had consistently defended the interests of his patients by asking the Guardians to improve the flooring in the infirmary. It had originally been composed of residue from the gas works and Valentine continually complained that the smell was not conducive to good health. The Guardians agreed to partially pave two strips of 15' x 5', presumably as walkways. On 10 November 1841 he was reprimanded for giving relief of bread and meat to a family of a sick pauper under his care without acting through the Relieving Officer, a sign of Valentine's impatience with bureaucracy.⁶²⁸ He also asked the Guardians to demolish and rebuild partitions in the infirmary, because their position caused one room to be too hot and one to be too cold. Valentine appeared to be too proactive for the Guardians. We have no clues as to Valentine's personality and perhaps he supported his zeal and determination with abrasiveness. The evidence seems to

⁶²⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 24 November 1841, p. 78.

⁶²⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 9 June 1841, p. 22.

show that whether he was abrasive or not he was determined to enhance the interests of his patients.

In January 1842 Valentine sent a complaining letter to the Poor Law Commission. This letter complained of the crowded nature of the children's sleeping rooms with only 15 inches between beds, the lack of progress of altering partitions in the infirmary, and the unhealthy smell from the gas refuse floor.⁶²⁹ The Guardians wrote back to the Poor Law Commission indicating that they would make changes but not to the composition floor apart from what they had already done.⁶³⁰ By writing to the Poor Law Commission Mr. Valentine appeared to have given up on the Guardians as agents for positive change.

Three months later another dispute arose. The Guardians were concerned that Valentine was ordering a pint of beer every day for all male inmates of the house over 70 years old, and half a pint for each woman employed in the washing house, which was notoriously humid and steamy. The Clerk wrote to the Poor Law Commission saying that this was against the rules of the workhouse but the Guardians 'feeling a Delicacy in interfering with Orders and recommendations given by the Medical Officer' did not know how to proceed.⁶³¹ The Poor Law Commission wrote back that they "cannot advise the Guardians to disregard the directions which he has given" and suggested that Valentine individually identify the men who should receive the beer each week and also suggested that the Guardians employ the washerwomen as

⁶²⁹ TNA: MH 12/9955, Poor Law Union Correspondence, 1842, Ludlow Poor Law Union, Medical Officer Valentine to the Poor Law Commission, 17 January 1842.

⁶³⁰ TNA: MH 12/9955, Poor Law Union Correspondence, 1842, Ludlow Poor Law Union, Ludlow Union Clerk to the Poor Law Commission, 7 February 1842.

⁶³¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 15 April 1842, p. 132.

servants and make the beer part of their wage.⁶³² The Guardians may genuinely have been concerned not to interfere with medical opinion, but their solution to having reform thrust upon them was to avoid discussion of the Medical Officer's proposals. However, Valentine was given the power to direct the workhouse master to provide food of quality and quantity for mothers of infant children suffering from diarrhoea and other maladies due to their emaciated state on entry.⁶³³

In 1840 poor relief in England and Wales cost 4.5 million pounds, but only £150,000 of that amount was spent on medical relief.⁶³⁴ Nursing was certainly not an area on which Unions spent money. Negrine describes the Leicester pauper nurses as 'elderly, incapable and unsuitable for nursing – many were hardly in a better state than the patients'.⁶³⁵ Employing pauper nurses was likely in workhouse infirmaries because there was no body of trained nurses until later in the century.⁶³⁶ In the Stroud workhouse in the 1860s pauper nurses were paid in gin as an incentive to lay out the dead and undertake other unpleasant duties.⁶³⁷ Nursing was also provided as out-relief, sometimes in the form of midwifery. It seems that Guardians, in addition to using paupers as nurses, sometimes kept a list of handywomen who could be employed as nurses.⁶³⁸ In 1865 the Poor Law Board recommended not employing pauper nurses, but their use was not abolished until 1897.⁶³⁹

⁶³² TNA: MH 12/9955, Poor Law Union Correspondence, 1843 - 1845, Ludlow Poor Law Union, Poor Law Commission to Ludlow Union, 26 April 1842.

⁶³³ SA: PL 9/2/1/5, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 31 January 1844, p.104. Analysis of relations between Medical Officers, Guardians and the Central Authorities is contained in Griffin from the perspective of 1857 and in Price from the perspective of 2015.

⁶³⁴ A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Macmillan, 1999), p.41.

⁶³⁵ A. Negrine, 'Medicine and Poverty', unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Leicester, 2008, p.99.

⁶³⁶ R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service* (The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967), p. 286.

⁶³⁷ R. Dingwall, *Introduction to the Social History of Nursing* (Routledge, 1988), p. 12.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, pp. 9-18.

⁶³⁹ A. Negrine, 'Medicine and Poverty', unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Leicester, 2008, p.99.

In addition to disputes between Ludlow Guardians and Mr. Valentine there were many occasions where Shropshire Medical Officers asserted their professionalism to challenge Boards of Guardians. Atcham was Shropshire's biggest Union and in 1867 the Workhouse Medical Officer refused to sign an amended Dietary Table because he did not agree to a change saying that suckling women should not have tea, and the proposal to substitute rice for potatoes on occasions.⁶⁴⁰ In Madeley the Medical Officer reported to the Guardians that the workhouse hospital was very defective and needed a fever ward and an isolation ward. The Guardians convened a special meeting which agreed to the Medical Officer's suggestion.⁶⁴¹

In Clun the central authorities recommended a change in the children's dietary and the Medical Officer was instructed to tell the Master how to improve the food. The result was more solid food for the children. This is an example in which the Medical Officer was deputed to instruct the Workhouse Master, contrary to the usual hierarchy.⁶⁴² Similarly in Newport the Medical Officer was asked to design a dietary for children.⁶⁴³ As a sign that attitudes to health and child health in particular were progressing, the 1855 Ludlow Workhouse Medical Officer asked for a more generous diet for children, to avoid debility and illness. The Guardians agreed to provide a better diet and more exercise for children.⁶⁴⁴

Workhouses began to move towards a public hospital system in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1861, of the 65,000 hospital beds available in England and Wales 50,000 or over 81% were found in workhouse infirmaries and sick wards.⁶⁴⁵ This reflected a

⁶⁴⁰ SA: PL 1/2/2/6, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1864 – 1868, 4 November 1867, p. 104.

⁶⁴¹ SA: PL 10/4, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1850, 21 May 1847, p.135.

⁶⁴² SA: PL 6/23, Clun Union Minute Book, 1844 – 1857, 8 February 1849, pp.138 and 140.

⁶⁴³ SA: PL 11/6, Newport Union Minute Book, 1853 – 1858, 6 May 1866, p.353.

⁶⁴⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1853 – 1857, 20 April 1854, p. 45.

⁶⁴⁵ R. Pinker, *English Hospital Statistics 1861 – 1938* (1966), p. 49.

better understanding of the needs of the workhouse population, because the vast majority of the inmates were the very old, the young, the sick and the infirm. This change of need required modification to the design of workhouses.⁶⁴⁶ That idea is reflected at Newport in the decision to convert the able-bodied men's room into nursery accommodation, there being no able-bodied men in the house.⁶⁴⁷

Shropshire Union infirmaries provided a skirmish-ground for the contrast of two concepts of medical relief for paupers. On the one hand Guardians, perhaps out of their depth in dealing with the new medical professionalism, and on the other hand the new professionalism of the workhouse medical officers, centring that professionalism on the care of patients. Ludlow Union provides much of the detailed evidence for this because of its clerks more expansive minuting style which did not attempt to conceal controversy. But also in Atcham, Madeley and minor Unions such as Newport and the geographically remote Clun Union, Workhouse Medical Officers asserted their professionalism, with demands for better medical care for paupers particularly for children. These demands, as far as can be understood, were received with Guardian acquiescence. The battles between Ludlow Guardians and Valentine were in the first decade of the Shropshire workhouse experience when professional relationships were being configured and perhaps before Guardians recognised the multi-faceted nature of the workhouse.

⁶⁴⁶ F. Driver, *Power and pauperism* (Cambridge, 2004), p.69.

⁶⁴⁷ SA: PL 11/6, Newport Union Minute Book, 1853 - 1858, 29 December 1857 and 7 September 1858.

Poor Law Unions and Outside Medical Agencies

In the eighteenth century there was a sustained period of national hospital building and this was true of Shropshire. In 1737 there was 'A Proposal for erecting an Infirmary for the Sick and the Lame of this County and Neighbourhood'. The movers of the proposal were concerned that the industrious poor suffered the 'double distress of sickness and want' and were 'left to languish without Attendance or Advice, in the hands of ignorant people'.⁶⁴⁸

At a meeting in 1745, there was produced a comprehensive list of the sort of medical cases provided for, and a comprehensive list of maladies and types of people not to be provided for. The exclusion list included 'women big with child' and 'children under the age of 7 years', though it was conceded that children could be admitted in 'extraordinary circumstances'. Other refusal criteria were applied to lunatics, people with infectious diseases such as smallpox and those with ailments deemed incurable.⁶⁴⁹ Levene has provided evidence that in the eighteenth century these rules were not rigorously adhered to and that children formed a substantial minority of patients in voluntary infirmaries.⁶⁵⁰

This list of inadmissibles satisfied the primary purpose of the infirmary, which was to rehabilitate the industrious poor so they could go back to work. The infirmary was not designed for the chronically ill, disabled and the dying. The Salop Infirmary suffered many vicissitudes but emerged resurgent in new spacious premises in 1830.

⁶⁴⁸ SA: 3902/6/2, a proposal for erecting an Infirmary, 24 July 1773.

⁶⁴⁹ SA: 3902/6/2, Report of Foundation of the Trustees of the Salop Infirmary.

⁶⁵⁰ A. Levene, J. Reinartz and A. Williams, 'Child patients, hospitals and the home in eighteenth century England' in *Family and Community History*, Vol. 15/1, April 2012, pp. 15 – 33.

It had 150 beds, which was 4% of the national total of hospital beds at a time when Shropshire had only 2% of the national population.⁶⁵¹

Most of the persons admitted to the hospital were agricultural workers and domestic servants with a few miners, quarrymen, and skilled workers. Almost all patients were of working age. The reason for this was that voluntary hospitals admitted patients on the recommendation of a subscriber, and as most subscribers were landowners or gentry it was their employees who were admitted. Nationally the finance for construction and running costs of a voluntary hospital was dependent on subscribers, who viewed such as the Salop Infirmary as a private sick club, with the employer contributing instead of the patient.⁶⁵² Despite these rules the Shropshire Unions often sent paupers with specific ailments or disabilities to the Infirmary and other institutions. However, the Poor Law Commission seemed confused about Union use of voluntary hospitals, and in 1838 advised Guardians that it was illegal to contribute to charities, including hospitals. In practice this was ignored by both Unions and the Poor Law Commission.⁶⁵³ Nationally many Boards of Guardians paid for paupers to be treated elsewhere or subscribed to voluntary institutions. Shropshire Unions regularly sent inmates to lunatic asylums but there is no evidence that any were children. Guardians in Shropshire Unions very often made use of outside medical agencies, particularly to help pauper children with specific disabilities.

Atcham Guardians wrote as early as 1837 to both Birmingham and Liverpool Deaf and Dumb Asylums to ask if they would take a child from that Union, and on what

⁶⁵¹ J. Woodward, *To Do the Sick No Harm, A Study of the British Voluntary Hospital System*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London), p. 36; B. R. Mitchell and P. Dean, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 8, 20.

⁶⁵² B. Abel-Smith, *The Hospital 1800 – 1948* (Heinemann, 1964).

⁶⁵³ R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service* (The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967), p. 196.

terms. The child went to the institution at Liverpool. The significance here is that Atcham Guardians, known for their harsh policies on Out-Relief were prepared to pay ratepayers' money to send a pauper child for treatment. The cost of the treatment is not stated but is likely to have been a regular sum each week, outside the personal scope of ratepayers except the wealthiest.⁶⁵⁴ As early as 1837 this seemed to be a blow against less eligibility, particularly remarkable for an Atcham Union chaired by Baldwyn Leighton.

In 1839 the Guardians did the same for another deaf and dumb boy, Robert Breathe. At a later stage the Guardians supplied Robert with tools for basket making in an attempt to help him to be independent.⁶⁵⁵ The same year, Madeley Union sent Edward Wynne, who was five years old, to Shrewsbury Infirmary to undergo an operation.⁶⁵⁶ Newport Union also sent a blind boy to Liverpool in 1839.⁶⁵⁷

Guardians, in addition to sending inmates to other institutions, maintained more than a financial interest. Ludlow sent one of their Medical Officers to inspect Mr. Jacob's Lunatic Asylum at Kingsland to check on the progress of Ludlow paupers.⁶⁵⁸ The Atcham Chairman, Baldwin Leighton, pressed the Union to 'take decisive steps to obtain a place for Sarah Bristow in the Institute for Deaf and Dumb Adults in Bloomsbury'.⁶⁵⁹ Leighton was an enthusiastic supporter of the workhouse as a deterrent against the able-bodied seeking relief, but even he saw that less eligibility was not a solution to Sarah Bristow's problems and that medical relief needed to deal with a variety of demands.

⁶⁵⁴ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, July to August 1837, pp.46, 48, 56.

⁶⁵⁵ SA: PL 1/2/2/3, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1851, 22 May 1848, p.80.

⁶⁵⁶ SA: PL 10/2, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 20 April 1837, p.122.

⁶⁵⁷ SA: PL 11/4, Newport Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1850, 17 December 1839, p.133.

⁶⁵⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/4, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1841 – 1842, 7 July 1841, p. 35.

⁶⁵⁹ SA: PL 1/2/2/3, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1851, 25 May 1846, p.23.

Where the Ludlow Guardians could be accused of transferring a troublesome child, was in the case of William Beaumont, who was sent to the Reformatory School at Redhill.⁶⁶⁰ Newport Union paid a subscription to the Royal Ophthalmic Hospital, thus allowing them to send patients there, and also sent a cheque for 5 guineas to the Buxton Bath Charity which was a hospital for the sick poor.⁶⁶¹ In 1864 they subscribed 5 guineas to the Birmingham and Midland Eye Hospital and promptly arranged for Richard Beavan to become a patient. The subscription entitled the Union to two indoor and eight outdoor tickets.⁶⁶² Ludlow Union continued to pay to send children to Liverpool Blind School and arranged for John Price to continue there while he learnt to make baskets.⁶⁶³

William Shaw, a boy in the Ludlow Workhouse, needed an eye operation and the Guardians asked a Union Medical Officer to obtain a ticket to either an eye hospital or Salop Infirmary. If he could not, the Guardians committed themselves to pay for the boy's treatment. He was admitted to Salop Infirmary a few weeks later.⁶⁶⁴ In 1870 Atcham sent James Griffith, a pauper, to learn a trade at a Blind School.⁶⁶⁵

The evidence clearly shows that inmates from various Shropshire Unions were paid for to attend other medical agencies.

⁶⁶⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1853 – 1857, 9 August 1855, p.128.

⁶⁶¹ SA: PL 11/7, Newport Union Minute Book, 1859 – 1863, 28 June 1859, pp.55 - 56. The Buxton Bath Charity Hospital had only opened in 1859, so the Guardians acted swiftly. It charged a maximum of 6 shillings per week per patient.

⁶⁶² SA: PL 9/2/1/10, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1861 – 1865, 1 December 1864, p. 457.

⁶⁶³ SA: PL 9/2/1/9, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1858 – 1860, 20 January 1859, p. 73.

⁶⁶⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/10, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1861 – 1865, 14 July 1864, p. 420; 8 September 1864, p. 434.

⁶⁶⁵ SA: PL 1/2/2/7, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1869 – 1873, 15 August 1870, p. 57.

Summary

The background to debate about the quality of medical provision for the poor between 1834 and 1870 is marked by the criticism of the system by Flinn and particularly Price. While that background is still dominant, Shropshire Unions' medical provision shows evidence of individual Medical Officers showing strong commitment to their patients. Price has written a book analysing the national picture of Poor Law medical provision, whereas this Thesis concentrates on Shropshire. The differing conclusions may well result from that geographical difference, but may also result from using different sets of archives. Some Shropshire Boards of Guardians also rose above the need for parsimony to attempt to meet the medical needs of paupers. Guardians found difficulty in reforming the poor law system, but on occasions supported their Medical Officer's professionalism.

Shropshire Unions appointed Medical Officers, both to manage Districts and where needed, workhouse infirmaries. The maximum size of medical districts was defined by the Poor Law Commission, and Wem Union's Districts were less than half the size of the maximum thereby offering at least a reasonable service to the Union paupers. Most Unions appointed Medical Officers by tender which help to keep salaries low, but four Unions appointed Medical Officers on fixed salaries. Ludlow Guardians were concerned about Medical Officers' qualifications and required their appointees to have two qualifications while the Poor Law Commission accepted one. A few years later the Poor Law Commission followed suit and required two qualifications. Within Ludlow Union, District Medical Officers showed professionalism and care for their patients by visiting some patients daily during critical phases of illness. Medical

Officers often prescribed food and alcohol (paid for by the Union) in an attempt to improve patients' immunity.

Workhouse medical provision was very common in Shropshire Unions. The Ludlow Guardians, under Medical Officer Valentine's direction, made efforts to counteract 'the itch' and they also recognised that the workhouse was not a healthy environment to help some children to recover from an undiagnosed illness, so they allowed those children to leave the workhouse and return to their villages. The children were then supported by the local Relieving and Medical Officers. The Ludlow Guardians found it more difficult to deal with the *causes* of ill health within the workhouse. While in the early years of the New Poor Law Ludlow's Medical Officers strong professionalism and their commitment to patients was documented, by the late 1840s other Boards of Guardians began to perceive Medical Officers as a valuable resource in serving their clientele.

From the outset of the New Poor Law, Boards of Guardians across the county used outside agencies such as local infirmaries and national asylums and institutes for specific disabilities.

Chapter 6

Child Employment and Shropshire Unions

Child labour is a term that creates emotion and calls up images of diminutive chimney sweeps, children working Lancastrian looms or children living a troglodyte existence in coalmines. These images are clustered together in the concept of child labour as a social problem caused by the Industrial Revolution. To provide background to this chapter it is worth briefly exploring how historians of the last 80 years have written about child labour.

Initially child labour was seen as a direct result of the Industrial Revolution. The Hammonds wrote that 'during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution the employment of children on a vast scale became the most important social feature of English life'.⁶⁶⁶ The Hammonds published *Village Labourer* in 1911. Despite agriculture being the largest employer of young boys the Hammonds devoted much less space to child agricultural labour than they did to child industrial labour in *Town Labourer*.⁶⁶⁷ Indeed the Hammonds concentrated largely on children working in mines and factories and described the work of humanitarians such as Sadler and Shaftesbury. The Sadler Committee of 1831 – 1832 produced a report criticising child labour but was strongly biased in that it did not ask the manufacturers to give evidence before the report was published. Even Engels, a fervent opponent of child labour, thought the committee was biased against the employers, and did not present

⁶⁶⁶ J. L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *Town Labourer, 1760 – 1832* (London, 1966) p. 145.

⁶⁶⁷ P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750 – 1870* (Palgrave, 2003), p. 5.

an accurate picture.⁶⁶⁸ The Hammonds however were convinced of the Committee's report's veracity and importance.⁶⁶⁹

E. P. Thompson, a Marxist historian, wrote that 'the exploitation of little children . . . was one of the shameful events in our history', though he qualified this by writing a few pages later that 'child labour was not new. The child was an intrinsic part of the agricultural and industrial economy before 1870 . . . The most prevalent form of child labour was in the home or within the family economy'.⁶⁷⁰ Walvin wrote about the beatings inflicted on factory children, perhaps extrapolating larger statements from small evidence.⁶⁷¹ Hartwell in 1971 accused some historians of indulging in moral and political judgements about child labour in addition to describing it. More recently research on the nature of the Industrial Revolution has indicated that large scale industrial production was highly regionalised and that most economic activity occurred on farms or in small scale factories.⁶⁷² The chapter on 'Standard of Living' showed that child labour was often integral to the economic viability of the family.

Demographic studies show that around 1830 – 1835 about 40% of the population was under 15, thus putting a strain on household budgets unless children worked at an early age.⁶⁷³ Many studies in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990, such as Kussmaul in the agricultural sector, Snell in the counties south of Shropshire, Dupree in the Potteries, and Anderson in Lancashire have all shown that household economies depended on child labour as one of their survival strategies. Coleman emphasises that the

⁶⁶⁸ F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Oxford, 1993), p. 179.

⁶⁶⁹ J. L. and B. Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury* (London, 1969), p.16.

⁶⁷⁰ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 367, 384.

⁶⁷¹ J. Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800 – 1914* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 64; P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750 – 1870* (Palgrave, 2003), p. 5.

⁶⁷² S. Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest* (Oxford, 1981); P. Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London 1992).

⁶⁷³ M. Anderson, 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.) *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750 – 1950* (Cambridge, 1990), vol. 2, p. 47.

eighteenth century saw child labour and the wages from it as entirely appropriate.⁶⁷⁴

Valuable contributions by children to the family budget did not always involve them earning money themselves. By performing domestic tasks such as child-minding, children released other family members to be economically productive. That was child labour of a non-payroll kind.⁶⁷⁵ Other writers have emphasised the wide range of factors affecting child employment practices.

The major theme running through this historiography is the contrast between child labour perceived as automatically a negative experience, and alternatively perceived as a near inevitable survival strategy for hard-pressed families. This contrast is encapsulated in Tomkin's review of Humphries *Childhood and Child Labour*.

Humphries uses the word shameful to describe child labour (page 12 and others) but Tomkins argues that eighteenth and nineteenth century adults may well have viewed child labour differently to today's western societies.⁶⁷⁶ In addition, for poor Shropshire families schooling was not a viable alternative to child labour until near the end of the nineteenth century. Even then schools were not an easy option for children.⁶⁷⁷

Recognition of the complexity of issues in writing about child labour history is contained in the writings of Eric Hopkins.⁶⁷⁸ He is aware of the need for working class families to augment their standard of living with children's earnings and recognises that in agricultural areas, child unemployment was a problem for families, and that in those areas child labour was neither novel nor controversial. The main

⁶⁷⁴ D. C. Coleman, *The Economy of England 1450 – 1750* (Oxford 1977), p. 19.

⁶⁷⁵ G. S. Becker, 'A Theory of the Allocation of Time', *Economic Journal*, 75 (Sept. 1965), pp. 493 – 517.

⁶⁷⁶ A. Tomkins, Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution, *English History Review*, August 2011 pp. 996 – 997.

⁶⁷⁷ J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour* (C.U.P., 2011), p. 360.

⁶⁷⁸ E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester, 1994).

concern he articulates is that child labour had a retrograde influence on the progress of working-class children's education, by providing an alternative to it. To send children to school rather than work was only viable if the family was not in need of the child's income and could afford the 'school pence'. Many historians have analysed the negative effects of child labour and the legislative attempts to alleviate them. Alternatively many argue that child labour had a role in increasing family incomes, was not uniformly physically cruel, that legislation confirmed what was already occurring due to social and economic reasons, and have argued that much debate about child labour is based on positive or negative myths.

Lavalette and contributors to his book explore different issues regarding child labour.⁶⁷⁹ The continued difficulties of passing legislation about chimney climbers enabled him to question whether the political elite were particularly concerned about child labour as some historians have maintained. There were not uniform experiences for child workers, and often orphans, children of lone parents and those from very poor families were more vulnerable than most to exploitation. He is at one with Cunningham in concern about unemployment and underemployment of children.⁶⁸⁰ Within that book Horrell and Humphries argue in their chapter that the Industrial Revolution did exacerbate the condition of child labourers and Kirby in his chapter argues that the Mines Act of 1842 was merely placing a limited legislative

⁶⁷⁹ M. Lavalette (ed.), *A Thing of the Past? Child Labour in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Liverpool, 1999).

⁶⁸⁰ H. Cunningham, 'The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England c. 1680 – 1851', *Past and Present*, 126 (1990) pp. 115 – 150.

framework on changes that were already occurring.⁶⁸¹ That view has resonance with the Shropshire coalfield where girls were not employed underground.

The concept of children being dependent on their parents so that they could be sheltered from the world of adult work is described by Heywood as only a relatively recent concept of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and writes that early historians saw child labour as a vice needing to be controlled by the state, with romantic philanthropists thwarting the designs of wicked industrialists.⁶⁸² He cautions against viewing child labour as a set of similar experiences for children, and writes that children's nineteenth century work experience could take many forms, with children of different ages in different localities, and that there was no typical experience.

Cunningham and Viazzo call into question the belief that the Industrial Revolution was the catalyst for exploitative child labour.⁶⁸³ Their opinion is that child labour was most widespread in proto-industrialisation as in cottage industries and small family workshops. This view is challenged by Horrell and Humphries who provide evidence that child labour was at its most intense in the 1820s and 1830s and that at that period the age at which children entered the workforce was at its lowest.⁶⁸⁴

In *Children of the Poor*, Cunningham describes how the different experiences of rich and poor children were deemed acceptable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but deplored in the nineteenth century, and how all children were latterly

⁶⁸¹ S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Child Labour and British Industrialization'; and P. Kirby, 'The Historic Viability of Child Labour and the Mines Act of 1842', in M. Lavalette (ed.), *A Thing of the Past? Child Labour in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Liverpool, 1999).

⁶⁸² C. Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁶⁸³ H. Cunningham and P. Viazzo (eds.), *Child Labour in Historical Perspective 1800 – 1985 – Case Studies from Europe, Japan and Colombia* (Unicef, 1995).

⁶⁸⁴ S. Horrell and J. Humphries, '“The Exploitation of Little Children”: Child Labor and the Family Economy in the Industrial Revolution', *Explorations in Economic History*, 32 (1995).

thought to deserve the opportunity of a work-free childhood.⁶⁸⁵ He writes that there was a mythology of a pre-industrial age where children worked with their parents on the land or in domestic industry or became apprenticed to a similar family and that myth was replaced by another semi-myth, a desperate experience of climbing boys and young textile workers, saved by Shaftesbury in a reincarnation of Moses taking children to the Promised Land. In 'Employment/Unemployment' he writes that there were large numbers of children unemployed or underemployed in eighteenth and nineteenth century England.⁶⁸⁶ He questions the validity of sources claiming that there were high levels of child employment in the eighteenth century and he cites evidence from the 1832 Report on the Poor Laws that showed concern over the lack of employment opportunities for children.

Clark Nardinelli's *Child Labour and the Industrial Revolution* argues that families made decisions about the need for their children to work on the basis of the families' needs.⁶⁸⁷ Therefore when the requirement for immediate extra income dissipated, the families were likely to wish to invest in their child's future, and the family's future, in a different way. The rise in family income would obviate the need for child labour if there were alternative methods of investing in children's future, as in education. In 'Child Labour and the Factory Acts' Nardinelli argues that labour legislation such as the Factory Acts merely hastened a decline of child labour caused by rising family incomes and the development of technology.⁶⁸⁸ In the process he accuses the influential Report of the Select Committee on the Bill for the Regulation of Factories (1832) as lacking veracity, and indulging in moral judgements. He also rejects the

⁶⁸⁵ H. Cunningham, *Children of the Poor* (Blackwell, 1991).

⁶⁸⁶ H. Cunningham, 'The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England c. 1680 – 1851', *Past and Present*, 126 (1990).

⁶⁸⁷ C. Nardinelli, *Child Labour and the Industrial Revolution* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1990).

⁶⁸⁸ C. Nardinelli, 'Child Labour and the Factory Acts', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 1980), pp. 739 – 755.

moral condemnation that historians such as the Hammonds expressed. Nardinelli's general thesis is discussed by Cunningham and Viazzo and their conclusion is that the decline of child labour is multi-causal, involving higher wages, technology, labour laws and compulsory schooling.⁶⁸⁹

Alan Heesom questions the motives for the passing of the 1842 Coal Mines Act.⁶⁹⁰ He argues that the 'Macdonagh model' of public opinion aroused to action by a social problem, resulting in legislation, was flawed. One part of the social evil was the proximity of naked or lightly clad girls and women working underground alongside men. Heesom argues that the prime motive for the legislation was to release children from work, in order to be educated in a traditional religious system which was an exercise in social control. A good account of the respective attitudes to pauper apprenticeships from both Poor Law Commission and Worcestershire Guardians is provided by Crompton.⁶⁹¹ He writes that the 1832 Poor Law Commission Report saw the advantages of pauper apprenticeships but argued for a period of time to elapse before the future of those apprenticeships was finalised, and that there was continual tension between Guardians, who saw apprenticeships as a functional solution to child pauperism, and the Poor Law Commission which had a more utilitarian viewpoint that apprenticeships, particularly with a premium, were against the principle of less eligibility.

The issue of sexuality and public decency is examined in Kirby, but he writes that promiscuity in the pits was probably exaggerated and that whole families often worked at the same coalface, and the washing of family members in a small family

⁶⁸⁹ H. Cunningham and P. Viazzo (eds.), *Child Labour in Historical Perspective 1800 – 1985 – Case Studies from Europe, Japan and Colombia* (Unicef, 1995).

⁶⁹⁰ A. J. Heesom, 'The Coal Mines Act of 1842, Social Reform and Social Control', *Historical Journal*, 24, 1 (1981) pp. 69 - 88.

⁶⁹¹ F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997).

house was no worse than the potential for nakedness at work.⁶⁹² The virtue of a family labour system is developed by Humphries and she writes that the arrangement had a protective element for girls.⁶⁹³ Agricultural gangs also produced moral concerns, not concerns about the employment of girls *per se* but concerns about girls working alongside boys and men. Humphries connects the removal of girls and women from the workplace during the nineteenth century to middle class values of sexual social control.

Kirby and Humphries hold contrasting views about the specific issue of the causes of short stature among children working in coal-mines, which is a significant subject for child labour in Shropshire. Kirby writes that child miners were commonly of short stature because they were often the children of short adult miners, who were self-selected to work in cramped conditions underground, and that this may have existed over generations.⁶⁹⁴ Also underground work and the absence of sunlight may have caused stunting because of rickets. While being of short stature, miners and their mining children were muscular and well-built, and because of high wages were able to afford a good diet. Humphries questions the premise that child miners were necessarily the children of adult miners, and writes that child miners might well have come from poor backgrounds and were stunted before becoming miners.⁶⁹⁵ She also questions whether child miners had the energy or time to consume a good diet,

⁶⁹² P. Kirby, 'Child Labour, Public Decency and the Iconography of the Children's Employment Commission of 1842', *Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History*, Number 62, October 2007.

⁶⁹³ J. Humphries, ' ". . . The Most Free from Objection . . . ": The Sexual Division of Labor and Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1987).

⁶⁹⁴ P. Kirby, 'Causes of Short Stature among Coalmining Children, 1823 – 1850', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 48 (1995).

⁶⁹⁵ J. Humphries, 'Short Stature among Coalmining Children: A Comment', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 50 (1997).

after a long shift underground. Kirby defends his position and bemoans the debate about child labour as being 'drowned with moral tears or ideological shouting'.⁶⁹⁶

Framing the Question

The conflicts between historians over the nature and value of child labour in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continue with the consideration of the labour of poor children in Victorian Shropshire. Similar questions are raised about the nature, necessity and value of children's work. This chapter will concentrate on the role of the Shropshire Poor Law Union in the administration of apprenticeships and the transition from workhouse to workplace. Since Poor Law Unions were responsible for the organisation of pauper apprenticeships after 1844, questions need to be asked of them regarding the Unions' motivation in apprenticing children, and their supervision of the transition from workhouse to workplace. There is also an issue comparing child miners on good wages but in an unhealthy and hazardous occupation with their peers in a well-run workhouse with education and health care.

How did Union policies about apprenticeships differ (if at all) from the pre-1834 parish policies? Did the apprenticeship policies of the central poor law authorities suggest that the authorities welcomed the responsibility, and did the Shropshire Unions take a positive view of the opportunities presented by apprenticeship?⁶⁹⁷ Much of the success or failure of apprenticeships depended on the employers, and so one needs to ask whether the Shropshire Unions took reasonable steps to ensure that the

⁶⁹⁶ P. Kirby, 'Short Stature among Coalmining Children: A Rejoinder', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 50 (1997); R. M. Hartwell, *The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth* (Methuen, 1971).

⁶⁹⁷ Positive in the sense of positive for the apprentice and not merely positive in the sense of reducing the poor rate.

employers of Shropshire pauper children lived up to their responsibilities? Of the apprentices themselves, were they apprenticed by the Unions against their wishes and against their long term interests? Much of this chapter will address the issues raised by these questions.

To address these issues, this chapter will firstly analyse the connections between legislation, central authorities' guidance and Poor Law Unions in the context of apprenticeships. Secondly, it will examine fourteen case studies of apprenticeships organised by Shropshire Unions, and reflect on the Guardians' conduct in the transition from workhouse to workplace.

Child Labour and Apprenticeships

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act showed little interest in the subject of pauper apprenticeship and the Poor Law Commission followed suit. Despite this, James Phillips Kay used his position as an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner to identify problems with the pauper apprentice system.⁶⁹⁸ He wrote in 1836 that paying a premium to an employer who took on an apprentice was problematic because it encouraged some employers to take on an apprentice only because of the premium, and that premiums were paid by parishes as a method of shirking the parochial responsibility to the child, and he also suspected employers of constructively forcing apprentices to abscond (after the premium had been paid.)⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁸ Kay was a writer on poverty and education who was also interested in economics. He became a Poor Law Commissioner in 1835. Later he was known as Sir James Phillips Kay Shuttleworth.

⁶⁹⁹ Parliamentary Papers, 1836, *Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission*, p. 74.

In 1839 he wrote that 'The payment of premiums for apprenticeships has been shown to be a system having many pernicious tendencies, and which have altogether failed to promote the well-being of the children.'⁷⁰⁰

The 1842 Royal Commission on Children's Employment in Mines and Manufactories identified abuses of the apprentice system. The resultant 1844 Poor Law Amendment Act transferred responsibility for apprenticing paupers from the parish to Poor Law Guardians. On 1st January 1845 the Poor Law Commission circulated the following to Poor Law Unions: 'We certainly entertain opinions unfavourable to that state of servitude which is created by the apprenticeship of parish children, and we should not greatly regret to find the regulations imposed by us tended gradually to diminish the number of children thus dealt with'.⁷⁰¹ This does not sound like a body committed to pauper apprenticeships. Indeed the Poor Law Commission was not committed to pauper apprentices except in special cases. There had been pressure from Unions, particularly urban ones, to continue parish apprenticeships for practical administrative reasons and Compton suggests that unofficial apprenticeships from Poor Law Unions occurred before 1845.⁷⁰² The inquiry into child labour in 1842 indicated some Shropshire Poor Law Unions had knowledge of children apprenticed to Staffordshire mining companies, though apprenticing at this time was not recorded in the minutes.⁷⁰³

The Poor Law Commission was in a dilemma because it felt that apprenticing of Union children was against the principle of less-eligibility and disadvantaged the children of independent labourers, but the practicalities of dealing with large numbers

⁷⁰⁰ J. P. Kay, *The Training of Pauper Children* (Clowes, 1839), p. 9.

⁷⁰¹ Parliamentary Papers, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1845, p. 16.

⁷⁰² F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Sutton, 1997), p. 199.

⁷⁰³ Parliamentary Papers, 1842, J. Mitchell, *Children's Employment Commission Report*.

of children in workhouses meant Unions wanted to continue the practice of apprenticing. The Poor Law Commission tacitly accepted the Unions argument while trying to hold the line on not using premiums.

Despite this mixture of equivocation and inaction the Poor Law Commission was quite specific in General Consolidated Order 1847, in which Articles 52 – 74 described in detail the duties of Unions when dealing with apprenticeships.⁷⁰⁴ In essence it described the rules that the Union was required to follow when apprenticing a child, and the responsibilities of the apprentice master.⁷⁰⁵

The indenture papers in the Cleobury Mortimer Poor Law Union archive show that the Poor Law Board had an extra strategy, previously used in the eighteenth century, for ensuring that their instructions for indentures were executed. They produced pro-forma indenture certificates which included in a printed form all the appropriate information needed to execute apprenticeships in a correct manner. All that was left for the Union to do was to fill in the gaps with appropriate information, such as names, and append the various signatures. For Cleobury Mortimer pauper William Crane the completed form included the following information: that the apprentice master would receive William without premium, and that the master was not a journeyman, was at least 21 years of age and a 'housekeeper', that he would ensure that William would be taught a trade, brought up in the principles of the Church of England, would be able to attend a national Sunday School and receive medical care when needed and be paid 1 shilling per week pocket money. The form also recorded that the

⁷⁰⁴ Parliamentary Papers, *Consolidated General Order*, 1847.

⁷⁰⁵ See Appendix 8.

signed permission of the parents was not required because 'both are dead'. The form was signed by the apprentice, the employer and the Clerk to the Guardians.⁷⁰⁶

If this was what was required of the Shropshire Poor Law Unions, how did the Guardians actually deal with apprenticeships? The information about pauper apprentices in Shropshire is scanty and tends to reflect the style of minute taking in the various Unions. Some Unions regarded the minute book almost exclusively as a vehicle for recording financial dealing. Some make reference to apprentices and servants, but not sufficiently to facilitate analysis. Cleobury Mortimer, however, retains some indenture certificates, and Atcham and Ludlow, which tend to include names of workhouse inmates, have many, sometimes expansive, references to specific apprentices.

Case Studies

Reading the following case studies it is possible to perceive a concern to follow the procedures described in the General Consolidated Order, but to present occasionally some eighteenth century attitudes, including the disposal of children to exploitative and uneducational placements. The eighteenth century attitudes are exemplified by the case studies involving Ludlow parish objecting to a disabled apprentice tailor gaining a settlement and therefore denying him the apprenticeship, and Unions allowing children to be apprenticed to Staffordshire charter-masters. The case studies include both apprentices and servants.

⁷⁰⁶ SA: PL 5/71, Cleobury Mortimer Apprenticeship Papers, 1828 – 1873, p. 241.

From these case studies we can deduce that the Ludlow and Atcham Guardians adhered to the instruction of both the Commission and the Board in dealing with apprenticeships, and used similar procedures when allowing children to become servants. In analysing the case studies one theme that is clear is that the Guardians, faced with a request for apprentices, carried out checks on the status and character of the potential employer. This resulted sometimes in not continuing with the indenture and coincided with the instructions contained in the Consolidated General Order.

The paucity of apprenticeship records for most of the Shropshire Unions leaves us relying on case-studies involving Atcham and Ludlow Unions. Perhaps these two Unions had confidence in their processing of apprenticeships and therefore were content to minute the transactions. Perhaps also the individual Guardians were proactive enough to wish to comment on individual cases and therefore the cases came to full Guardian meetings. It is possible in other Unions that the Workhouse Master dealt with apprenticeships without the active supervision of the Guardians.

The case studies involved boys and girls moving away from the security of the workhouse. Some of the case studies involve children apprenticed to mine-owners and charter-masters in pits other than in Shropshire. In the Children's Employment Commission of 1842 the section on Apprentices in Shropshire Mines and Ironworks begins, 'The system of taking apprentices in the mines and binding them to work until 21, if not totally unknown, is at any rate exceedingly rare; and witnesses who were examined on this point stated that they had never heard of such a thing'.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁷ Parliamentary Papers, 1842, J. Mitchell, *Children's Employment Commission Report*, p. 38.

In contrast the Staffordshire section of the report states that many boys are apprenticed into mine working and that the workhouses of Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Stourbridge (Worcestershire) had almost no boys in them, and in consequence, no schoolmaster. William Gove, a mine agent to mine owner James Loxdale gave evidence that there were twice as many boys in the pits receiving wages than boys apprenticed and 'if we had no apprentices, the mines could not be worked at the present expense, and the masters would be sufferers'.⁷⁰⁸ However an agent of the Wombridge (Shropshire) collieries described apprenticing of boys as 'wicked'. Writing of apprentices Mitchell (the author of the Shropshire section of the Commission Report) states that 'all the charter masters of Shropshire of whom inquiry was made, spoke of it with horror, and said it was as bad as the African Slave Trade'.⁷⁰⁹ Guardians of the various Shropshire Unions could not fail to be aware that Shropshire collieries did not employ apprentices but Staffordshire and Black Country ones did. They must also have been aware of the views of the mine agents and charter masters because in Madeley and Wellington there was a crossover in personnel between Boards of Guardians and industrialists.

Another question that arises from the case studies is whether the apprentices performed tasks that were suitable for apprenticeships. Paupers sent out from the workhouse into domestic service were inevitably going to perform menial tasks in an employer's home in the early years of their career but as long as their conditions of service and remuneration were no worse than other servants, the practice was acceptable in mid-nineteenth century terms. The Unions also equipped paupers

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 65.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 38.

going into service with suitable clothes. The principle of going into paid employment was the same for the girls going to a textile factory (Case Study 9).

The case of apprentices is qualitatively different from that of servants, however. Servants were paid employees and could leave employment if they wished, and the relationship between employer and employee was a financial one, based largely on market forces. The apprentice, though, was not employed on the same basis. In the understanding of the term the concept of apprenticeship assumes that the employer teaches the apprentice a skill and that will set the apprentice apart as a skilled craftsman. In return the apprentice forgoes wages decided by market forces and gives his labour in return for board, lodging and the learning of a marketable skill, which the generality of people do not possess. The evidence gathered by the Children's Employment Commission in Staffordshire clearly indicated that the apprentices, including those sent from Shropshire Unions, did not acquire particular skills but worked alongside and on the same tasks as non-apprenticed workers, who were earning wages. 'There is nothing whatever to learn (in the mines) though no doubt practice may produce an increased dexterity' is clear evidence from the Children's Employment Commission Report. The Report cites the Cornwall mines, where great skill was required but had no apprentices, whereas the relatively less technical Staffordshire mines had many.⁷¹⁰ At the age of 14 the apprentice may have earned 6d. or 1s. a week pocket money but was working alongside other boys who were earning 14 shillings a week. The report continues to explain that the use of apprentice labour is of advantage to the butties who work the mines because they

⁷¹⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1842, J. Mitchell, *Children's Employment Commission Report*, Volume XVI (Appendices and Evidence), Report No. 381, p. 19.

can produce cheaper coal, and the mine proprietors can claim some of those excess profits as increased rent for the use of the mine.⁷¹¹

Analysis of Case Studies

These are grouped into four categories, those cases relating to concern about employers, servant, idiosyncratic cases, and miners, each indicative of a different aspect of children's work.

Concern about Employers

Case Study 1

The Atcham Guardians allowed the Workhouse Master some leeway in deciding on the release of children to be servants. That laxity caused a problem in 1866, when for no obvious reason at the time, a resolution was passed at a Board meeting that the rules were to be changed. Up to that point the master had made decisions regarding the children going into service and informed the Guardians retrospectively. From the passing of the resolution the Guardians took control and made the decisions about children leaving the workhouse to be servants. The reason for this became apparent a few months later when the master was reprimanded for allowing a workhouse girl to work for his daughter at her house during the day and then returning to the workhouse to sleep, thereby allowing his daughter to acquire a free

⁷¹¹ Butties and charter masters were the people who were contracted by the mine owner to extract the coal, and therefore they provided the equipment, employed the miners and organised the work.

servant.⁷¹² In this case study the Atcham Guardians were shown to be capable of counteracting abuses, even when it involved their senior staff.

Case Study 2

George Pugh of Leominster, a shoemaker, applied in 1851 to the Ludlow Union for Arthur Williams, who had been with him on trial, to be apprenticed to him. Williams wished to be apprenticed, but it appeared that the Guardians had suspicions about Pugh's occupation and asked the Clerk to make enquiries. 'Two respectable householders' from Leominster wrote to the Guardians informing them that George Pugh was not fit to be in charge of apprentices. The Clerk also ascertained that he might not be a shoemaker in the sense of owning his own business but was a journeyman. The Apprenticeship was refused, though the Guardians told Pugh that he could hire Williams for six months.⁷¹³ This is a case where the Ludlow Guardians exercised their authority by not apprenticing a boy to an employer of whom they were suspicious.

Case Study 3

In 1848 Joseph Measure of Downton, a tailor, wanted Henry Jones, aged 16, as apprentice for five years with a premium of 30 shillings for clothing. The Clerk was asked to make enquiries about Measure, and as a result the Ludlow Guardians refused to complete the apprenticeship. It was refused because of doubts about his

⁷¹² SA: PL 1/2/2/6, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1864 – 1868, 19 February 1866, p. 55; 16 July 1866, p. 66.

⁷¹³ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 17 September 1851, p. 172; PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1849 – 1853, 1 October 1851, p. 175.

character occasioned by his marriage certificate having alterations on it.⁷¹⁴ This case is indicative of a Union making meticulous enquiries (to the extent of minutely examining a possibly false marriage certificate) and then drawing conclusions as to the employer's morality.

Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 show that Atcham and Ludlow Guardians ensured that children were not apprenticed to inappropriate employers.

Servants

Case Study 4

In the spring of 1838 the Atcham Union received a letter from William Richards, a collier from Wellington, requiring a servant. A Relieving Officer was directed by the Board to make enquiries as to Richards' character. Apart from other considerations the Guardians may have wondered why Richards had not asked the Madeley or Wellington Guardians, much closer than Atcham. It is not recorded what replies the Relieving Officer received but as a result the Guardians declined to send a boy as a servant.⁷¹⁵ This is another example of a Union making appropriate enquiries about a potential employer.

Case Study 5

In 1857 a pauper girl named Ellen was in service to Mr and Mrs Smith, who ill-treated her. The case came before Ludlow Petty Sessions which found the Smiths guilty

⁷¹⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1849, 12 July 1848, p. 235.

⁷¹⁵ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 30 April 1838, p. 101; 7 May 1838, p. 106.

and fined them £2 with costs.⁷¹⁶ This case shows that the law protected pauper servants from criminal employers. The case's inclusion in the Guardians' Minutes indicates that the Ludlow Guardians felt that they retained a duty of care even after the pauper had been indentured. This case study is remarkable because Ellen was no longer technically the responsibility of Ludlow Guardians, but her case was obviously followed in the court and considered important enough to minute. Perhaps the Guardians or the Clerk felt a long-term responsibility for former inmates of the workhouse.

Case Study 6

In 1841 the Clerk to the Atcham Guardians employed Eliza Rider (a workhouse inmate) as a servant but he reported that despite 'her character and behaviour having been very good' she was 'not strong enough', but rather than send her back to the workhouse he asked for her to be employed by him for another month in order to find her another situation. It is not recorded if he was successful.⁷¹⁷ This is a curious case because it can be inferred from it that the Clerk (a very significant figure in the Poor Law Union) thought that returning Eliza Rider to the workhouse would not be in her interest, at least regarding future employment prospects.

Case Studies 4, 5 and 6 show that the two Unions were serious about their responsibilities to ex-workhouse children who went into domestic service.

⁷¹⁶ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1853 – 1857, 2 April 1857, p. 241.

⁷¹⁷ SA: PL 1/2/2/2, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1840 – 1845, 26 April 1841, p. 47.

Idiosyncratic cases

Case study 7

'Mr. Wall Junior of Berrington applied for Mary Anne Newell as servant but her character having been bad while in the workhouse it was thought advisable for her to remain for the present (in the workhouse) in hope of her being reclaimed'. This case study shows the Atcham Guardians in a positive light. If Mary Newell was a bad character one might have thought that the Guardians would have taken the opportunity to remove her from the workhouse.⁷¹⁸

Considering together case studies 6 and 7 there is a conflict of Union attitudes. In Case 6 the Clerk thought that a return to the workhouse was in Eliza Rider's best interests, but in Case 7 the Guardians decided that Mary Anne Newell's best long term interests lay with remaining in the workhouse. These cases allow different interpretations. Did the Atcham Clerk have a more realistic (and cynical view) of the nature of the workhouse than the Guardians who were more distant from the actual conditions inside of the workhouse. There is no evidence of sexual abuse in Case 6 but young girls going into service were potentially vulnerable to inappropriate actions by employers. The possibility (unsupported by any evidence) is that the Clerk wished Eliza Rider to be employed by one of his friends, thus allowing the Clerk access to her, without the direct connection of employment.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ SA: PL 1/2/2/2, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1840 – 1845, 26 April 1841, p. 47.

⁷¹⁹ For more analysis of potential sexual abuse in the workhouse see the chapter on 'Domestic life of Shropshire Workhouse Children.'

Case Study 8

‘It was resolved to bind the lad John Cartwright of the parish of Diddlebury – who had lost a leg, as apprentice for 5 years to Mr. Joseph Edwards, Munslow with a premium of £12.’ Half the premium was paid on binding and half was paid a year after the binding.⁷²⁰

Article 54 of the Consolidated General Order specifically allowed for a premium in cases of pauper disability. Twelve pounds was a high premium and indicative of the difficulty of placing a child with one leg. Digby writes that in Norfolk disabled children were directed towards apprenticeships while physically able children were given industrial training.⁷²¹ Humphries’ chapter on apprenticeships contains no reference to disabled children.⁷²²

Case Study 9

In 1846 Messrs. Walmsley and Brothers at Marple near Stockport, Cheshire, wanted nine girls to work in their textile mill. The Ludlow Workhouse Master found suitable girls who wanted to go and enquiries ascertained that Messrs. Walmsley was a respectable company. The Guardians allowed the girls to go to Marple as employees and ordered Mr. Russell the Workhouse Master to take them there and stay there ‘until the children shall be put to work, lodged and otherwise provided for’.⁷²³ This case study has been included even though the girls were to be employees and not apprentices or servants. Russell, the Ludlow Workhouse Master, was an important figure in the Union and yet the Guardians required him to make an

⁷²⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 – 1849, 31 May 1848, p. 225.

⁷²¹ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁷²² J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 256 – 305.

⁷²³ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 – 1849, 11 February 1846, p. 30.

open-ended commitment to the girls' wellbeing. Conversely, the Guardians wished the girls to be settled not only for the girls' sakes but to ensure they did not return to the workhouse.

Case Study 10

James Lane, a boy with only one leg, was to be apprenticed to a tailor. Lane had his settlement in Diddlebury and the tailor worked in Ludlow. During the period of the Clerk's enquiries the Overseer of Ludlow became concerned about the likelihood of Lane not being successful as a tailor and becoming a burden on the Ludlow rate-payers later, because he would gain settlement in Ludlow if apprenticed there. Lane was not apprenticed.⁷²⁴ This is a case in which the interests of the child were subordinated to the concerns of the parish of Ludlow. This Case Study is an example of hard-headed parish officials from St. Laurence's parish in Ludlow who put the interests of the St. Laurence ratepayers ahead of those of the pauper. It is perhaps also an indication of the views of some that apprenticeships were merely a short term expedient of uncertain value for the pauper, or why would they have been concerned about what would happen after the expiry of the indenture?

Case Study 11

In 1845 Ludlow had an inmate named Lewis who had absconded from the workhouse and had been apprehended. When returned to the workhouse to face his punishment he told the Master that he wished to go to sea. The Clerk was instructed to enquire whether Lewis could go to the Marine Society's ship at Deptford. The

⁷²⁴ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1853 – 1857, 19 April 1855, p. 108.

reply from the Society said that they would accept pauper boys if they were at least 4' 9' tall and fit and healthy. They also required a premium of three guineas.

Presumably the Guardians paid the premium and travel expenses because Lewis' father, also a pauper, took him out of the workhouse and travelled with him to Deptford.⁷²⁵ This arrangement seems to have suited both the boy and the Union.

The boy embarked on a career that he wanted, and for the outlay of three guineas and travel expenses, the Union avoided years of paying in-maintenance or out-relief.

Regarding this case study, the usual premium was exceeded but Article 74 specifically exempts paupers going to sea from the other rules.⁷²⁶ This case study is also an example of the Guardians behaving in a pro-active way when they could have persisted with punishment for the absconder even if only to set an example for other potential absconders.

Miners

Case Study 12

In March 1847 Robert Middleton, a miner of Wednesbury, Staffordshire, asked the Ludlow Guardians for 'strong pauper lads as apprentices'. Three boys, George Flicher, John Lewis, both aged 12 and Francis Haycox, aged 10 were sent from the workhouse to Wednesbury for a month. In June 1847 a fourth boy joined them and in October three of the boys were apprenticed with a premium of 30 shillings each for clothes. But 'the boy Flicher having objected to the business of mining and his

⁷²⁵ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 – 1849, 22 October 1845, p. 6.

⁷²⁶ Parliamentary Papers, *Consolidated General Order, 1847*, Article 74, 'Nothing contained in this Order shall apply to the apprenticing of poor children to the sea service'.

mother consequently refused her consent to his being bound. The Board declined to apprentice him'.⁷²⁷

The significance of this case is that the preferences of the pauper and parents were uppermost in making the final decision.

Case Study 13

Jonathan Middleton, a miner from Wednesbury, Staffordshire, wanted two boys as apprentices. The Ludlow Guardians ordered the Clerk to make enquiries of West Bromwich Union as to Mr. Middleton's character and asked the workhouse Medical Officer to establish the boys' fitness to be miners. As a result of these enquiries the boys were apprenticed with the 'consent of all parties' with a premium of 30 shillings for clothing and travel expenses to Wednesbury.⁷²⁸ Three years later the father of one of the apprentices complained to the Guardians that his son and others were kicked and punched by the foreman in Middleton's pit and were not given enough to eat. The Guardians asked one of the Relieving Officers to investigate the allegations. The Relieving Officer visited the mine and the boys without warning, and all the boys except one, named Steward, expressed satisfaction with their working conditions and their diet. The Relieving Officer found Steward's breakfast where the boy had hidden it instead of eating it. Middleton offered to go to the next Board meeting with the boys and give them an opportunity to complain about their working conditions and food. He said that if any did criticise him he would relinquish all rights

⁷²⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 – 1849, 10 March 1847, p. 24; 1 June 1847, p. 142; 20 October 1847, p. 174.

⁷²⁸ SA: PL 9/2/1/7, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1849 – 1853, 10 July 1850, p. 89.

over them. The Board was satisfied that Middleton was a good employer.⁷²⁹ It is not recorded what happened to Steward. A few months later Middleton wanted another apprentice, but the Guardians told him that before he could be given another one he had to provide for George Smallman aged 13 who had been hurt in Middleton's pit and sent back to the workhouse. Smallman was promptly re-apprenticed in the same mine. The case reveals that the Ludlow Union was prepared to investigate the suitability of employers, and to react to parental complaints. The resolution of the Smallman apprenticeship was beneficial. However, the report on children in coalmines, discussed later in the chapter, calls into question the suitability of apprenticing children to miners even in Staffordshire and the ability of children to protest about their treatment. This was a practice not often countenanced in Shropshire coalmines.

Case Study 14

In December 1845 Mr. Leech, a dissenting minister, asked for 'four stout pauper boys' to be apprenticed as miners in Darlaston. Four boys were found, who 'have stated their wish to be apprenticed'.⁷³⁰ The Clerk was required to write to the Poor Law Commission for their opinion because Darlaston was at least thirty miles away. Testimonials were also to be sought as to the fitness of the potential apprentice master, William Haston. Multiple assurances as to his character were received from

⁷²⁹ SA: PL 9/2/1/8, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1853 - 1857, 17 November 1853, pp. 14-15.

⁷³⁰ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 - 1849, 5 December 1845, p. 18.

the incumbent and parish officers, and Messrs Lloyd and Co. (probably the company employing Haston as a chartermaster).⁷³¹

However, the Poor Law Commission was slow to respond to the clerk's letter, so the matter of the apprenticeships was deferred pending the reply. Later on the boys, aged 13 and 14, were sent on trial for one month. It was expected that they would be apprenticed until 21 years old because a premium of 30 shillings in clothing was agreed. It seems very unlikely that Ludlow Guardians did not know that Shropshire mine owners and managers did not employ apprentices for ethical reasons. If they knew that, they decided on an unethical arrangement with Staffordshire mine-owners. However, the boys involved were described as enthusiastic at the opportunity. This Case Study addressed the issues identified in the Consolidated General Order and the Ludlow Guardians exercised caution in contacting the Poor Law Commission because the indenture would have taken place at the limit of the prescribed distance.⁷³² The premium granted to the apprentice master accorded with the rules regarding premiums and length of indenture, and the occasions in which the premium did exceed suits of clothes were in cases which were specifically allowed by General Consolidated Order.⁷³³

While mines in the Shropshire coalfields did not routinely use apprentices, they did employ very young boys underground, earning the market rate for the job. Even though they were well-paid compared to agricultural labourers, their working conditions and experiences and the long-term effects of their employment are

⁷³¹ SA: PL 9/2/1/6, Ludlow Union Minutes, 1845 – 1849, 5 December 1845, p. 18; 31 December 1845, p. 21; 14 January 1846, p. 24.

⁷³² Parliamentary Papers, *Consolidated General Order, Poor Law Commission, 26/7/1847*, Article 58, 'No child shall be bound to a master whose place of business, whereat the child is to work and live, is distant more than thirty miles from the place in which the child is residing at the time of the proposed binding, or at the time of his being sent on trial to such master.'

⁷³³ Parliamentary Papers, *Consolidated General Order, 1847*, Articles 54 and 56.

disquieting. The 1842 Children's Employment Commission Report offers evidence of the life of children in Shropshire mines and the eventual consequences of that employment.

The children underground (only boys in Shropshire mines) were often very young. There is an example of a 4 year old, but many child miners started at 6 or 7 years of age. They worked long days at hazardous and injurious work in difficult conditions. Evidence to the Report from Shropshire surgeons portrays miners as strong and healthy but prey to disease in later life, and for child miners to suffer from rickets. The compensation for child miners in such working conditions was their high wages when compared to children or adults working in agriculture.⁷³⁴

In Staffordshire mines, apprentices suffered the same hazards and health issues as well-paid miners, but were only paid 'pocket money', whereas employed child miners earned good wages. Apprentices in the mines did not learn a trade, but merely acquired experience and dexterity. Some of the tasks of child miners were based on haulage of carts in narrow coal seams, work done by ponies in mines with wider seams.

Summary

The regulations of the Central Authorities sent to Unions regarding apprenticeships were an attempt to regulate an activity that the central authorities were equivocal about. The Shropshire Poor Law Unions, as far as one can ascertain from sparse evidence, in general applied the regulations diligently, though Ludlow did allow the

⁷³⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1842, *Children's Employment: First Report of the Commissioners (Mines)* with Appendix, XV, p. 4.

parish of St. Laurence to reprise eighteenth century attitudes, and did apprentice children to the Staffordshire mines. Unions clearly carried out checks on potential employers, as the regulations required, and as a consequence did not allow the children in case studies 5, 6 and 7 to go to become apprenticed.

The Unions were concerned about the character of those employers, and also their status as tradesmen or journeymen. Premiums to apprentice masters were paid appropriately and where they did exceed the cost of a suit of clothes, the cases were specifically allowed by the Consolidated General Order. The amputee in Case Study 8 was specifically allowed a large premium by Article 4 of that order. The premium paid in Case Study 11 was specifically exempted by Article 74, and that case is an example of Ludlow Guardians being pro-active in the child's interest. There are also examples of children's wishes not to be apprenticed as mineworkers being honoured and in consequence not being indentured. Ludlow Union also showed a sense of responsibility for previous inmates of the workhouse, exemplified by Case Study 5. Workhouse Master Russell's journey to Stockport to establish the welfare of pauper employees is also indicative of a caring attitude to vulnerable children. However, it can also be argued that Shropshire Unions' ensuring that pauper apprentices were successfully settled in their occupations made it less likely the children would need to return to the workhouse at a later stage.

The criticism of the Unions lies in their hypocritical decision to continue with the apprenticeship of boys to the mining charter-masters. They would have been aware of Shropshire mines not using apprentices and yet they continued to apprentice boys to Staffordshire mines. Work in the mines was not employment through which boys could acquire a trade and were often only used to work on tasks performed by ponies

in other regions. Apprentice miners also worked alongside and performed the same tasks as children earning very good wages when the apprentices themselves earned pocket-money at best.

Aside from their apprenticing of miners, the Unions did supervise children's transition from workhouse to workplace, with concern for the children's wellbeing.

Chapter 7

Shropshire Poor Law Unions and Out-Relief

The Whig Government elected in 1830 instituted a period of reform, and in 1832 carried out an investigation of the Poor Laws. This investigatory report and the subsequent Poor Law Amendment Act sought to use deterrent workhouses as the prime tool of relieving and disciplining the able-bodied. While the focus of the 1832 – 1834 Commission of Enquiry and the subsequent Act was on the use of workhouses as a deterrent, the focus of pre-1834 poor relief was the relieving of poverty in people's homes. The chief concerns of the reformers were the able-bodied and the payment of allowances to supplement inadequate wages.

In the 1820s and early 1830s there was a move away from workhouses and towards out-relief, supported by paternalist magistrates committed to a caring ethos.⁷³⁵ Use of deterrent style workhouses was unlikely to become the norm under the weak pressure of permissive acts, though this was happening in Southwell. Poor Law reformers understood the need for mandatory legislation if workhouses were to supplant out-relief, particularly for the able-bodied.⁷³⁶ To provide background to this chapter on out-relief it is valuable to explore how historians have written about it in the last 100 years.

Analysing the literature concerning Union out-relief involving children, it is striking how little specifically pertinent content there is. Generally, outdoor relief is not accorded a

⁷³⁵ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700 – 1930* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 56;
D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England 1780 – 1840* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 171 – 172.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

literature of its own, but is usually compared with in-maintenance, and considered alongside the workhouse as alternative poor relief strategies. As a result some literature, while ostensibly targeted at workhouses, has implications for an understanding of out-relief.

Historians' work about out-relief centres on themes, but addresses those themes disproportionately. Out-relief to women has some literature, based largely on women as workers and/or dependents. Much historiography about out-relief concerns attitudes to its provision and that is reflected in this review of the literature. There is little directly concerning out-relief to children or families including children and little about the levels of out-relief payments and their relation to wage levels. This latter deficiency will be remedied in this chapter.

In their book *The Last Hundred Years* the Webbs drew attention to the fact that most children were relieved at home and yet there is very little information about those children. The 1832 – 1834 report concentrated on the able-bodied and almost ignored those who were too ill, too old, and too young for employment. The Webbs write that the little time that the central authorities spent on consideration of children on out relief is out of proportion to the large numbers of children on that relief. The children were predominantly seen not as people in their own right but as dependents of somebody else.

Eric Hopkins reflects this lack of records by contrasting the treatment of children ante- and post-1834.⁷³⁷ Before the Poor Law Amendment Act poor children could be relieved under different justifications. Outside of the workhouse parents might have received cash or payments in kind from an overseer, sometimes as a supplement for

⁷³⁷ E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed* (Manchester University Press, 1994).

inadequate wages, or as a child allowance, paid for the third and subsequent children.

Much of the debate about out-relief after the Poor Law Amendment Act centres on the treatment of the able-bodied, particularly men. That still affects children in a fundamental way because many able-bodied men would be fathers, and if the father is relieved only in the workhouse then in general so would be the whole family (for good or ill). If Unions granted out-relief, rather than in-maintenance to the able-bodied it gives tentative historical insight to any particular Union's attitude to the legislation and the Commission's and Board's regulations, and it also allows judgements to be made about the Unions' sense of responsibility to its poor *vis-à-vis* its responsibility to the central authorities and about the Unions' financial priorities. This insight into the policies of Shropshire Poor Law Unions will be gained later in the chapter.

Often the nearest that the historian can get to the treatment of poor children in the historiography is to investigate the treatment of women, particularly young women under the New Poor Law, because women's lives were often inextricably connected with their lives as mothers. The authors of the Poor Law Report 1832 – 1834 assumed the primacy of the stable two-parent family, and therefore the poverty of women and children would be relieved by the income of husbands and fathers. Pat Thane regards this as incompatible with the social and economic realities of the 1830s, because of low pay, under or unemployment and premature death.⁷³⁸ Many women, deserted or abandoned, supported children on negligible income.

Unmarried mothers were the only women to be mentioned in the 1832 – 1834 Report,

⁷³⁸ P. Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop* No. 6 Autumn 1968, pp. 29 – 51.

and they were to be relieved in the workhouse, with the Guardians not able to sue the putative father for maintenance. This policy regarding the father's responsibility was changed in 1844 after protests, to enable pursuit of fathers.

Analysis of poor women is also undertaken by Levine Clark.⁷³⁹ The New Poor Law envisaged women as dependants of male providers and when women chose to seek poor relief they were forced to do so as either single women or workers. While able-bodied men could be dealt with simply in their own right by the Poor Law Authorities, for women it was far more complicated. A daughter or a wife of an able-bodied man would be ineligible to seek relief and could only receive relief via their male provider. Married dependent women received aid according to their husband's status. For widows relief was more complicated, since they could be women (ex-wives) and therefore receive out-relief, or able-bodied workers in which case they would be relieved in the workhouse or at home.⁷⁴⁰

Single women, who were not dependent on a male breadwinner, were expected to work and their able-bodiedness was measured by their ability to obtain employment. To think of women as conforming to a male concept of able-bodiedness worked against the Victorian concept of gender roles.

Michael Rose has written extensively about the New Poor Law, out-relief, the role of the workhouse and the influence of private charity and wrote that the Speenhamland system gave relief to supplement low wages.⁷⁴¹ The 1832 – 1834 Royal Commission viewed that as a great evil and recommended that the able-bodied should receive no

⁷³⁹ M Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief: Women, Ablebodiedness, and the New Poor Law in Early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Winter 2000), pp. 107 – 130.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 123.

⁷⁴¹ M. E. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, December 1966, pp. 607 – 620; M. E. Rose, 'The Disappearing Pauper: Victorian Attitudes to the Relief of the Poor' in E. Sigsworth (ed.), *In Search of Victorian Values* (Manchester University Press 1988), pp. 56 – 72.

outdoor relief, and that any relief be given in workhouses. The Poor Law Commission reports of 1840 – 1847 show that outdoor-relief to the able-bodied continued, at least to an extent. This is confirmed by Digby, who shows that out-relief to the able-bodied was never eradicated.⁷⁴² The Central Authorities issued the Outdoor Labour Test Order in April 1842 and the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order in August 1852 with the threat of surcharging Guardians if they gave relief inappropriately. The central authorities, though, allowed exceptions to the rules, were vague on defining ‘able-bodied’ which effectively allowed a determined Board of Guardians to offer out-relief to the able-bodied almost with impunity. Rose writes that out-relief for the able-bodied continued because it was cheaper than using the workhouse.⁷⁴³ Hurren writes that in Northamptonshire the middle 1860s were times of poor harvest, and farmers were concerned about trade unionism. Guardians ‘adopted a crusading attitude to save money and to reassert their authority over the labouring poor’.⁷⁴⁴ Out-relief to widows provided another area of contested ground between Guardians and the central authorities with widows’ out-relief declining only after 1870.

Rose comments on Guardian reluctance (particularly in the North) to spend ratepayers’ money on expensive workhouses and workhouse staff. Guardians also found it difficult to reconcile the role of the workhouse as both ‘curative or preventative’. He notes that in large towns there was a plethora of charities helping the poor avoid the workhouse, and that the ‘contagion of pauperism’ was seen by the non-pauper as an urban, not a rural problem.

⁷⁴² A. Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth-century England* (The Historical Association, 1985) pp. 19 – 26.

⁷⁴³ Parliamentary Paper, *Poor Law Board, 22nd Annual Report 1869 – 70* (8vo ed.), p. xxxiii.

⁷⁴⁴ E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism* (Royal Historical Society, Boydell Press, 2007), p. 103.

Boot has written about the well-organised Manchester Union(s).⁷⁴⁵ In Manchester in 1845 10,000 people were on out-relief compared to 1400 in the workhouse. Indoor relief was used as a threat to discourage relief applications in the pressured years, but outdoor relief was more readily granted during the prosperous years, though 1845 was not a particularly prosperous year. Short-time working accounted for a proportion of outdoor relief claims. Boot writes about a six week lag between unemployment and application for relief and Boyer describes the lag during the Cotton Famine as between 4 to 8 weeks.⁷⁴⁶

While Digby stresses continuity between the Old and New Poor Law, Williams writes that unemployed men did not necessarily receive out-relief during the New Poor Law and the number of unemployed workers receiving out-relief declined.⁷⁴⁷ Snell agrees that farmers gathered to themselves more political power by administering relief and that increased submissiveness of labour to employers.⁷⁴⁸ He argues that the rebalancing of that relationship resulted in reduction of agricultural wages.

In *Solidarities of Strangers* Lyn Hollen Lees writes about Poor Law legislation, out-relief and its administration but sets it in the context of the functioning of society.⁷⁴⁹

The success of welfare systems relies on the consent of all parties, the poor, the authorities and the taxpayers, and that social citizenship is at the core of poor relief. In her analysis of the Old Poor Law she emphasises that the poor had a right to relief and that while its Tudor beginnings were punitive it evolved into a relief- giving service. The 1832 – 1834 Report is useless as a study of poverty because the

⁷⁴⁵ H. M. Boot, 'Unemployment and poor law relief in Manchester, 1845 – 50', *Social History*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (1990), pp. 217 – 228.

⁷⁴⁶ G. R. Boyer, 'Poor Relief, Informal Assistance, and Short Time During the Lancashire Cotton Famine', *Explorations in Economic History* 34(1), pp. 56 – 76.

⁷⁴⁷ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 68 - 75.

⁷⁴⁸ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁷⁴⁹ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

authors imposed their own view of the labour market on to the concept of poverty. When people applied for relief they signalled a belonging to society, but later as prosperity increased, the non-paupers failed to recognise the pauper as part of their society. Lees rejects the idea of the Poor Law as a linear process culminating in the Welfare State and regards poor law provision as moving from meagre to generous (and back again) at various times.

Driver complements Lees' work by writing about the connection between the central authorities, fighting at times a rearguard action to defend uniformity, and against some Unions, particularly in the north of England.⁷⁵⁰ In 1835 the Commission was confident of ending out-relief to the able-bodied and yet a year later they deferred the application of this policy to women. The Prohibitory Order stated that the able-bodied should only be given relief in the workhouse, with numerous possibilities of exceptional cases which allowed non-compliant Guardians to undermine the order. The Supplementary Test order relaxed even this, by allowing outdoor relief to the able-bodied in return for a labour task such as rock-breaking. In 1842 this Order was sent to other Unions in an amended state, requiring half of the relief to be given in kind. By the Eighth Annual Report of 1842 the Commission recognised that it could not achieve national conformity with its wishes on out-relief.

Echoing his book's title *Power and Pauperism*, Driver views the history of the Poor Law as the 'history of power relations' – the power of the central authorities and their orders, the power of workhouse design, the local power of Guardians and Officers, the occasional power of popular resistance and ultimately the powerlessness of paupers.

⁷⁵⁰ F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

After the New Poor Law had ceased to be novel, Guardians began to realise that they had substantial autonomy on implementing the Law for the benefit of their locality. In rural areas farmers were generally the largest economic group on the Board of Guardians. Local magnates maintained their presence because magistrates were ex-officio Guardians. During the 1840s rural Unions began to give out-relief to the able-bodied who were temporarily unemployed thus expanding the reach of the New Poor Law to the able-bodied. Digby writes that under the Old Poor Law allowances were allowed in aid of wages, but from the 1840s it was in aid of sickness.⁷⁵¹ Farmer Guardians subverted the New Poor Law system and they preferred to pay outdoor-relief rather than use the workhouses. And as a consequence, workhouses in Norfolk became less than full as the economic needs of farmers channelled relief for agricultural labourers into out-relief. The workhouse became the home of the 'economically useless'.⁷⁵² For farmers who did not want to employ their labourers during the winter, outdoor relief provided a cheap solution and still enabled their workforce to return to the farm in the spring. The cost of relieving farm labourers fell to all ratepayers not just farmers. Because out-door relief suited the agricultural economy Digby writes that the Crusade Against Out-relief of the 1870s and 1880s was ineffective in rural areas, particularly in Wales which had always resisted the New Poor Law.

Another local study has been written by Samantha Williams, who has made an analysis of poor relief strategies in a parish in Bedfordshire consisting of a small town,

⁷⁵¹ A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law' in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London, Macmillan, 1976), p. 157.

⁷⁵² A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 12.

Shefford, and a rural settlement, Campton.⁷⁵³ This book shows the effect that the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had on poverty in that parish and how poor relief became an integral part of everyday life, and 1801 was a year in which nearly half of Campton inhabitants received relief. Some not on regular relief needed parish assistance with family burials. Twenty-nine percent of relief costs were directed at paupers not resident in the parish. She indicates that needing relief was largely caused by life cycle and those needing relief were generally the old and lone mothers. The demand for poor relief was not inherited.

Contrasting the cost of workhouse provision and out-relief Lees shows unsurprisingly that relieving people in the workhouse was approximately twice as expensive as relieving them on out-relief.⁷⁵⁴ One of the reasons for this was that workhouse care needed to meet the totality of inmates' needs, whereas outdoor relief was perceived as needing to be topped up by other income. Lees quotes Williams who shows that payments were 1s. 0d. per week in the 1840s, rising to 2s. 0d. per week by 1900.⁷⁵⁵ In Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, payments to the elderly were about 3s. 0d. per week. Lees writes that pensions for the elderly were more generous than relief given to families or younger people. Sums of 1s. 0d. and 2s. 0d. are commonplace as amounts of relief to families. This chapter of the thesis will dispel some of the vagueness of levels of out-relief and will provide accurate levels of out-relief paid to lone children and families in three Shropshire Unions.

The Literature Review presents a picture of an unscientific enquiry into the Poor Law with an emphasis on the agricultural areas of the south of England and its labour

⁷⁵³ S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760 – 1834* (The Royal Historical Society, The Boydell Press, 2011).

⁷⁵⁴ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 185 – 190.

⁷⁵⁵ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (Routledge, 1981), pp. 169 – 172.

market. This was followed by enquiry recommendations and then legislation that articulated solutions before evidence was examined. As occurs so often in these chapters, children in their own right are not often mentioned and then largely as dependents of poor able-bodied men or women. The literature also shows substantial antagonism to the Poor Law Amendment Act in the industrial north of England and subversion of the legislation's aims in some rural areas. In some cities, industrial areas and in some rural counties, a system based around a deterrent workhouse did not meet the needs of either that locality's poor or even their Poor Law Guardians. In a chapter entitled 'Shropshire Poor Law Unions and Out-relief' mention of the workhouse is inevitable and necessary because out-relief was the main alternative to the workhouse, even if only the result of a labour test.

Framing the Question

In analysing the effect of Shropshire Unions' out-relief policies relating to children we need to seek the answers to questions emanating from the work of other historians. Initially some of these questions are simple examinations of procedure. How did Shropshire Unions construct the mechanisms for establishing the need for out-relief and how did they distribute that relief? Were these procedures conducted well and efficiently?

Once the mechanisms for paying out-relief were established, questions arise about the targeting and generosity of payments. What needs did paupers have that were alleviated by out-relief? Who received it, and was the workhouse offered instead? Bearing in mind that historians deem out-relief to be cheaper than in-maintenance, how generous were payments? How far did out-relief meet the needs of paupers?

Considering the variety of Unions in Shropshire, with great variations in size, variations in locality and variation in attitudes to the poor, and particularly children, how did the quality and quantity of out-relief vary between Unions?

The surviving sources vary enormously in both quality and quantity, and do not permit this chapter to answer all those questions for all Unions. Some issues will be considered in depth for selected Unions.

Various historians emphasise that while some families are always poor, that poverty can be exacerbated at times because of life cycle and other issues, even bad luck, so did Unions recognise that degrees of poverty fluctuated and that at times families need more assistance than usual? How did Union out-relief policies impact on children or on children as part of families, bearing in mind that children were not able to seek their own relief? One over-arching question is whether out-relief payments to families with children or lone children were financially more generous than provided by the earnings of independent labourers? Allied to that question is whether out-relief payments would provide equivalent material benefits achieved in the workhouse. Providing answers to these and associated questions will be the purpose of this chapter.

To answer these questions this chapter is structured in three parts. Initially there will be a brief description of the organisation of out-relief. Secondly, Ludlow Union will be used as a case study illustrating how Shropshire Unions developed their procedure for establishing the needs of paupers, the nature of those needs, and to whom the Union gave relief. The third part will develop some of the analysis of interactions between other Unions and paupers which became apparent in the Ludlow case study. For this section, four Unions have been selected illustrating a cross-section of

localities in the centre and north of the County. Wellington was an almost entirely industrial Union. Madeley was a semi-industrial union with iron-workings, coalmines and lime quarrying but also stretched south across agricultural land to the small market town of Much Wenlock. Atcham was the largest union in Shropshire stretching east to west across the middle of the county without a market town. It was called Atcham Union because when it was formed as an Incorporation in 1792 Atcham was the first on the list of constituent parishes. It was essentially rural and contained 43 parishes. The fourth union is Ellesmere, which is a rural union adjacent to Wellington and Madeley and had a close relationship with the industrial unions due to migration and settlement issues, as did Atcham. The last part of this chapter will measure levels of out-relief paid to families in three Unions with substantial numbers of paupers. That will show that amounts of out-relief given to families varied considerably between Shropshire Unions.

The Organisation of Out-Relief

General relief to paupers as opposed to medical relief came in two forms. One type of relief was offered in the workhouse, and the other type was offered in the form of goods and/or money to paupers living at home and this was called out-relief. The paradox of out-relief is that while there were many more paupers on out-relief than there were in the workhouse, out-relief for all but the able-bodied male was hardly mentioned by the central authorities.⁷⁵⁶ In Shropshire Unions in the 1840s

⁷⁵⁶ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government, the Last 100 Years*, Vol. 1, March 1929, p. 151.

approximately 22% of paupers received indoor maintenance, with 78% receiving out-relief.⁷⁵⁷

In Atcham in 1837 the number in the workhouse was 170 but the number receiving out-relief was 1,006, though the Atcham Guardians set about immediately reducing that ratio between the two.⁷⁵⁸ In Ludlow in 1841 proportions were similar to Atcham, with 294 transactions (294 different people in the workhouse during the year) and 1,133 paupers sustained by outdoor relief. In Ludlow, of those 294 workhouse inmates 118 were children, whereas 418 children received out-relief at some point during the same period.⁷⁵⁹

While the Poor Law Inquiry Commission of 1832 – 1834 and the subsequent Poor Law Commission pursued their agenda, Guardians were confronted on attaining office with the problems of the old, the young, the disabled and the ill. They were also confronted with the contrast between the comparatively expensive option of relieving someone in the workhouse and the cheaper option of relieving them in their own home. In reality resourceful Guardians with a strong sense of their discretionary powers and an understanding of the loopholes in the rules could avoid the restrictions placed on out-relief to the able-bodied.⁷⁶⁰

It is important to be aware that many able-bodied paupers had families but the central point remains that the central authorities' interest in outdoor relief consisted in refusing it to the able-bodied. One extenuating measure was the proposal for multiple workhouses in a Union, one of which could be for children. This idea was

⁷⁵⁷ Parliamentary Papers, *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission, 1844*, Appendix B No. 1 272 – 273.

⁷⁵⁸ SA: PL 1/16/7/3, Abstract of the Application and Report Book, Atcham Union, 1839 – 1841, inside front cover.

⁷⁵⁹ SA: PL 9/3/6/1, Ludlow Financial Statement, 1841, 25 September 1841.

⁷⁶⁰ Parliamentary Papers, *Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission XI* (1841) pp. 128 – 129.

almost totally lost in the debate about the single mixed workhouse, though it was used in various forms in some Shropshire Unions.⁷⁶¹

Ludlow Poor Law Union – Organisation of Out-Relief

The Guardians of the Ludlow Poor Law Union first met on 18 July 1836, and at that meeting they decided to appoint three relieving officers and to separate the Union into three relieving districts, with an officer in charge of each one. The Union consisted of 32 parishes, though some, like Cold Weston (population 25) were quite small. The main duties of a relieving officer were to receive applicants for relief, assess them in an appropriate way including a visit to the applicant's house, to periodically monitor those on relief in his district, and arrange medical attendance where necessary and to deal with urgent cases by either offering the workhouse or giving out-relief. He also distributed out-relief to paupers in his district.⁷⁶²

The Guardians decided to advertise the Relieving Officers posts at £1. 0s. 0d. per week. This is approximately the same as the wage of skilled colliers in the coal mining areas of the county such as Madeley.⁷⁶³ The average weekly wage of an unskilled farm labourer in Shropshire was between 8s. and 9s.⁷⁶⁴ The Relieving Officers also had to provide a bond since they were handling and disposing of large amounts of money. Since these were entirely new posts nationally there were no experienced staff available to the Guardians and they had to make appointment decisions solely on the skills and attitudes they thought the post required and how the

⁷⁶¹ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834*, p. 375, 430, 467, 450.

⁷⁶² *The Consolidated General Order, 1847*, Article 215.

⁷⁶³ H. Scott, 'Colliers' Wages in Shropshire 1830 – 1850', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, Vol. LIII 1949 – 50, pp. 1 – 22.

⁷⁶⁴ SA: PL 9/24/1/1; PL 9/24/2/1; PL 9/24/3/1, Ludlow Union Application and Report Books.

candidates matched them. The skills and attitudes would have been industry, since officers travelled over a wide area to receive applications for relief; literacy and numeracy since accurate record-keeping and accounting were required; and honesty since they worked fairly unsupervised and dispensed large amounts of money.

The principal part of the Relieving Officer's job was to visit all the parishes in his district and to accept paupers' applications for relief, which he would record in the Application and Report Book and present that at the Guardians' meeting for them to approve relief. If he decided that the need was particularly urgent he could give relief immediately. In the Application and Report Book he would identify all the aspects of the claimant that might have a bearing on the application, such as age, health, income, family – both dependants and those who might offer support, such as children able to work. On the basis of what was written in the Report Book a decision would be made by the Guardians.

The Relieving Officer was also a conduit for medical relief and facilitated access to the District Medical Officer and was required to compile a list of those paupers who were never likely to be able to look after themselves, either because of age or being wholly disabled, or permanently ill. Records of permanent relief do not exist for the early decades of the Union but are available from 1859. They show that those on permanent relief were approximately equal in numbers to those on temporary relief.

Accepting that financial relief administered by the Union was not generous, the Relieving Officers with the tacit acceptance of the Guardians devised one way to improve the lot of the paupers. In the week before Christmas 1836 they increased financial outdoor relief by more than 50% and often by between 90% and 100%.

(See Table 7.1) The Guardian minutes do not indicate that there was debate or

concern about the Christmas rises in relief, and the totals returned to normal the week after Christmas. These increases continued for four years, until the Guardians ended the practice.

Table 7.1

Weekly totals of outdoor relief paid by Ludlow Union in the periods immediately adjacent to Christmas from 1836 – 1840.

1836	12th December	£73. 3s. 1d.
	nineteenth December	£68. 5s. 3d.
	26th December	£105. 16s. 1d.
	2nd January 1837	£74. 12s. 5d.
1837	eighteenth December	£70. 9s. 11d.
	23rd December	£150. 0s. 9d.
	1st January 1838	£64. 6s. 8d.
1838	seventeenth December	£70. 6s. 4d.
	24th December	£113. 8s. 7d.
	31st December	£73. 14s. 11d.
1839	11th December	£62. 2s. 11d.
	eighteenth December	£78. 2s. 7d.
	23rd December	£151. 18s. 0d.
	1st January 1840	£57. 8s. 6d.

1840	16th December	£65. 13s. 11d.
	23rd December	£130. 6s. 4d.
	30th December	£89. 14s. 3d

Analysis of Application and Report Books from Ludlow Union.

Application and Report Books completed by Relieving Officers have been analysed in order to retrieve statistics on the nature of the applicants for relief, from the point of view of whether they were able-bodied or not, and also from a family perspective, the nature of their requests for relief, the result of that request, and the criteria used to admit applicants into the workhouse.

Five Application and Report Books were used in this analysis. The Application and Report Books for Bitterley District for the two quarters ending Michaelmas 1840⁷⁶⁵ and the same district for the quarter ending Christmas 1840;⁷⁶⁶ Diddlebury District for the quarter ending Christmas 1840⁷⁶⁷ and also Diddlebury District for the quarter ending Lady Day 1841,⁷⁶⁸ and finally Ludlow St. Laurence's (the town of Ludlow) Midsummer to Christmas 1840.⁷⁶⁹ These five books were chosen because they represent a preponderance of rural over urban districts which reflects the nature of the Union. The dates were chosen because they spanned the period of Midsummer 1840 to Lady Day 1841, and by 1840/1841 the new Workhouse had been built and was operating effectively.

⁷⁶⁵ SA: PL 9/24/6/1, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Bitterley District, June to September 1840.

⁷⁶⁶ SA: PL 9/26/6/2, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Bitterley District, December 1840 – March 1841.

⁷⁶⁷ SA: PL 9/24/8/3, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Diddlebury District, December 1840.

⁷⁶⁸ SA: PL 9/24/8/4, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Diddlebury District, March 1841.

⁷⁶⁹ SA: PL 9/24/9/6, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Ludlow District, June 1840 – June 1842.

In a survey of Application and Report Books over a six-month period, significant findings emerged. If you were to apply for relief, you stood a very good chance of being successful. Only fourteen per cent of applications for relief were refused completely.⁷⁷⁰ Many decisions to refuse relief were motivated by a perception that the applicant had enough money to support him or herself, or had relatives who could help to support them. In Diddlebury a family consisting of two able-bodied adults and five children wanted funeral expenses for the youngest child.⁷⁷¹ It was refused because both parents were able-bodied, and the father earned 9s. a week with a low rent. Also in Diddlebury district a married couple with six children wanted material for clothes, and this was refused because the father was earning 9s. per week, his wife and the two eldest children aged 12 and 10 were all able-bodied. In Bitterley a man with 'bad breath' with a wife and four children aged 15, 13, 7 and 2 wanted sheets and blankets and this was refused because he owned property.

Sometimes it is impossible to understand why relief was not granted. In the Bitterley Application and Report Book five consecutive applications were turned down without written reason. The applicants wanted a pair of shoes, 1s. extra relief (already had 3s. weekly), 6d. extra relief (wholly disabled 75 year old woman with 3s. already), a pair of sheets and a blanket (disabled man, with wife and four children), and 3s. weekly (partially disabled old couple). While some of these five applications were not as strong as some cases, other paupers in similar situations had relief granted so perhaps it says more about the Guardians on that day than the paupers. At the stage of deciding on whether to grant relief, Guardians were very powerful and able to make judgements without accountability or appeal. The Ludlow Guardians may have

⁷⁷⁰ See Tables 7.16 – 7.20.

⁷⁷¹ SA: PL 9/24/8/3, Ludlow Application and Report Book, Diddlebury District, December 1840.

made judgements, not merely on the merits of the case, but also on criteria such as perceived respectability or deferential attitude of paupers.

Despite this only 14% of applications for relief were refused. Fifty-five per cent of applications were granted in full, nine per cent were partially granted, and ten per cent were granted in full but in kind, often in the form of food or material for clothes. The rest were either deferred for more information or to contact the pauper's home parish, if s/he did not have settlement in the Ludlow Union, or were offered the workhouse, or referred to the discretion of the Relieving Officer. Therefore paupers stood a good chance of receiving what they asked for or a large proportion of it (partially granted relief generally meant more than half the request). Very few were sent home empty handed.⁷⁷²

Most relief applications were from the non-able-bodied or ill. Of the rest, able-bodied men were the next category closely followed by able-bodied women.⁷⁷³ However, almost all of able-bodied men were heads of families and if they were single, they were quite old. Most applications were from families with two parents, with the man as the head of the family and they were often requesting medical relief for children.⁷⁷⁴ Single women made up the next largest category and most of these were old, though young women were either very ill or pregnant. Lone women with a family were the next largest category. If children of lone women were bastards, their mothers were very often offered the workhouse with no alternative. If the children were 'legitimate' they were given either outdoor relief or offered the workhouse. Six per cent of applications were *on behalf of* children, often orphaned and sometimes deserted.

⁷⁷² See Tables 7.16 – 7.20.

⁷⁷³ See Tables 7.2 – 7.6.

⁷⁷⁴ See Tables 7.7 – 7.10.

Of the nature of requests, well over half were for medical relief.⁷⁷⁵ This is interesting in that there was no compulsion on the Guardians to appoint Medical Officers in 1836 but it was transparently obvious from the founding of the Union that they were to play an important role. While 14% of requests were rejected, it is extremely rare for a medical relief request to be turned down, and then largely because the claimant could afford private medical care.

Funeral expenses were often applied for and routinely granted. Poor families might manage on a low income on a week-by-week basis, but the expenses of a funeral were beyond their means. Those on permanent relief occasionally needed more and applied for extra relief, often for a specific purpose. Coal was sometimes requested, sometimes agreed to, but often not.

In the period of the survey the amalgamation of the Application and Report Books show that 124 people were admitted to the workhouse. Of those 30 were children who were parentless or went into the workhouse without their parents. Twenty-eight of those admitted to the workhouse were lone women with a family, of which some had illegitimate children. This shows that Ludlow Union generally pursued the commission's policy with regard to unmarried mothers.

Nature of the Applicants for Relief

Tables 7.2. – 7.6. analyse the nature of the applicants for relief, largely differentiating between able-bodied and not able-bodied, basing that entirely on the information recorded in the Application and Report Books. Within the able-bodied category sub-categories are then identified: able-bodied men, able-bodied women, children and

⁷⁷⁵ See Tables 7.11 – 7.15.

requests on behalf of the deceased. Young people up to the age of and including 15 are denoted as children, though the Union viewed people much younger than that as economic units.

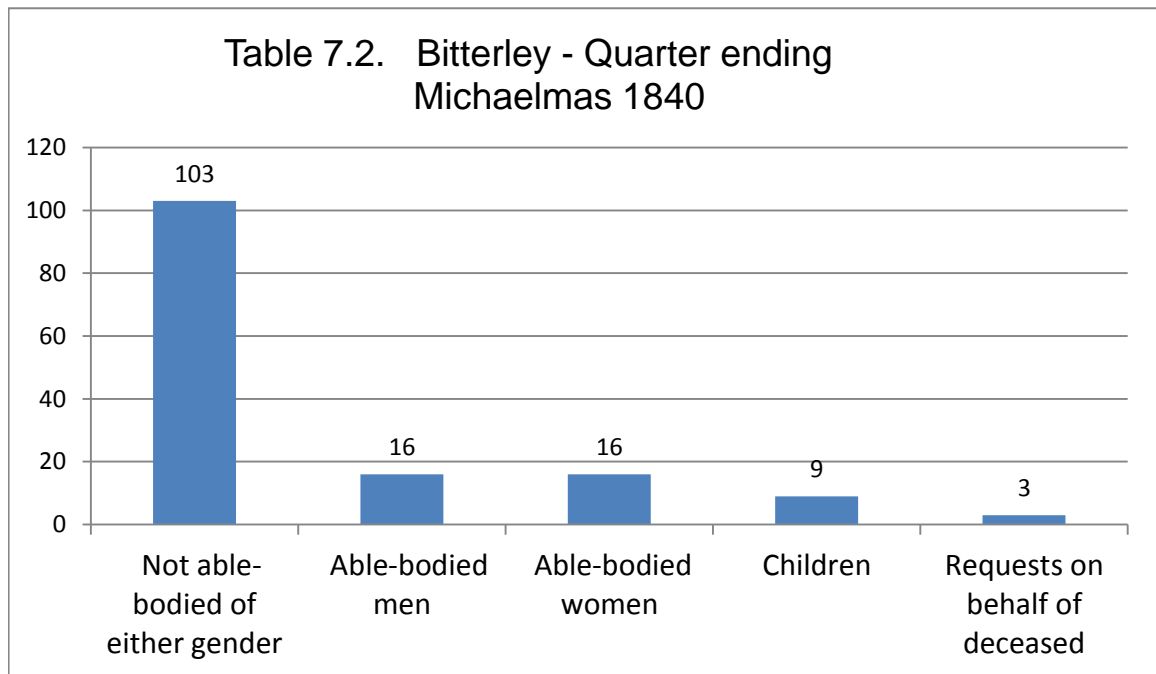


Table 7.3. Bitterley - Quarter ending Christmas 1840

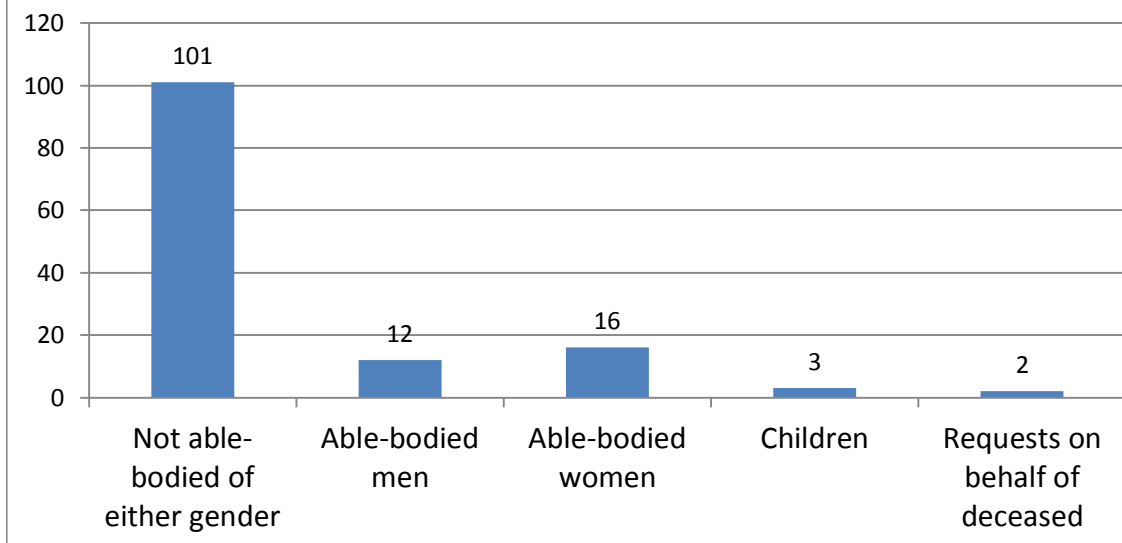


Table 7.4. Diddlebury - Quarter ending Christmas 1840

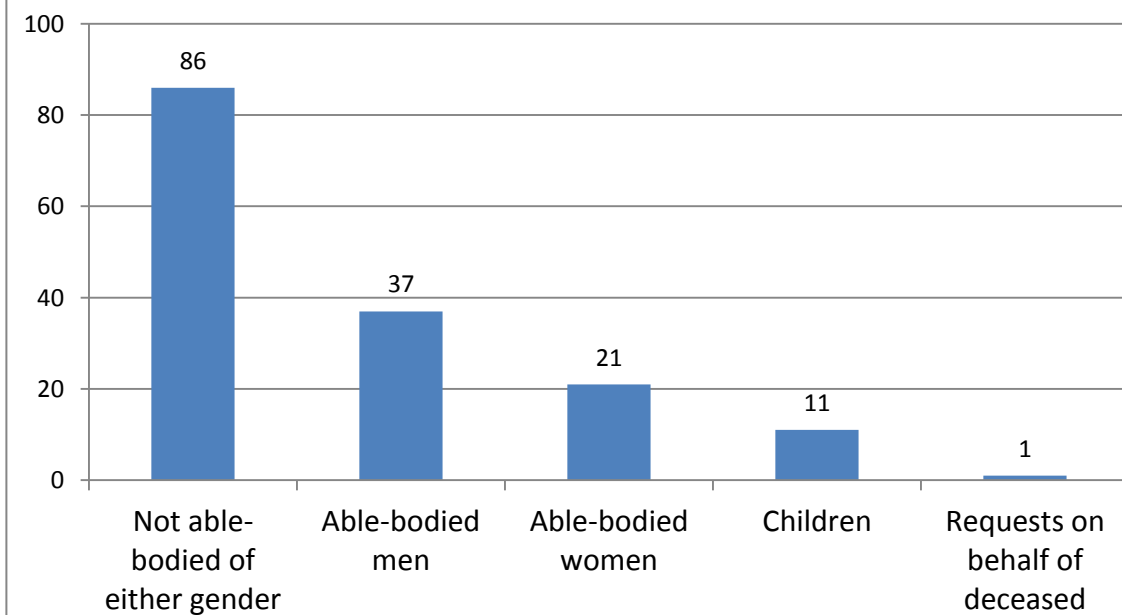


Table 7.5. Diddlebury - Quarter ending
Lady Day 1841

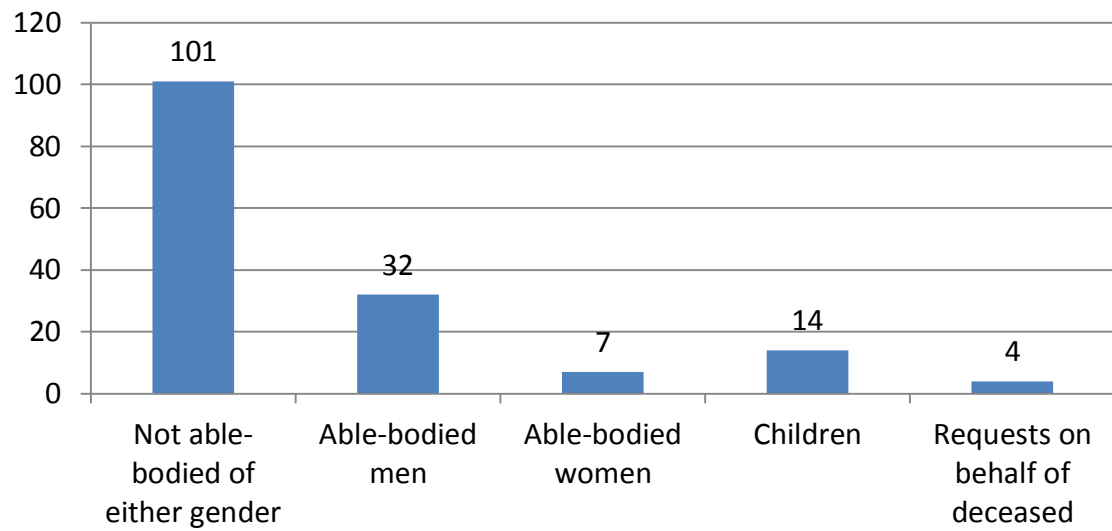
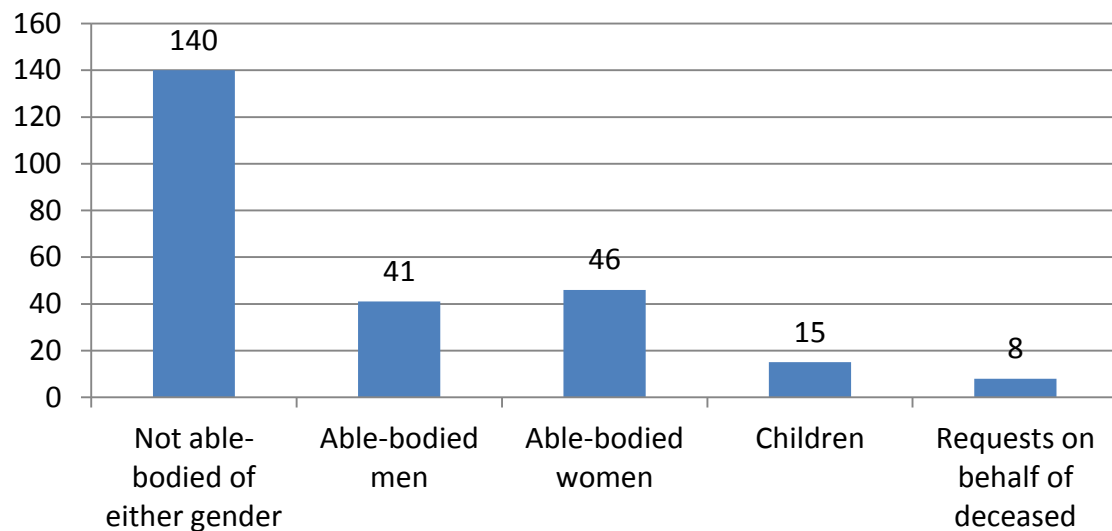


Table 7.6 St. Laurence, Ludlow - Midsummer to
Christmas 1840



Nature of Applicants for relief from a family perspective

Tables 7.7. to 7.10 analyse the nature of the applicants from a family perspective, irrespective of able-bodiedness. It analyses whether the applicant was a man with a wife and family, a single woman, a lone woman with a family, a couple comprising man and woman, a single man, a lone man with a family, or a child (or on behalf of a child).

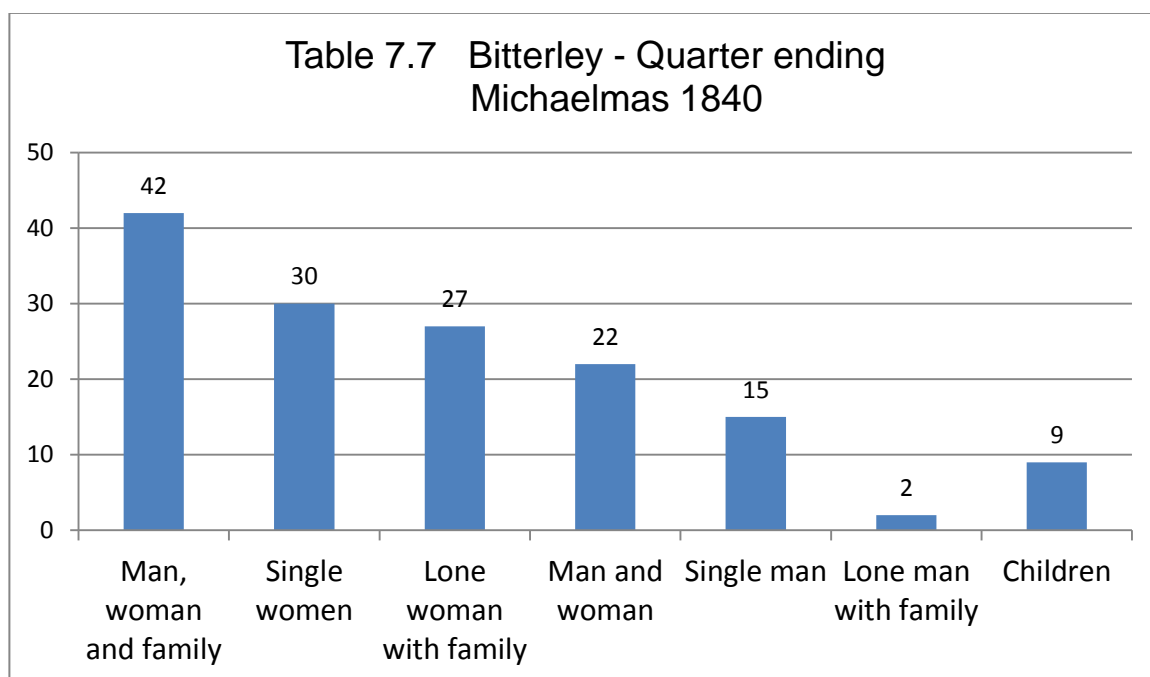


Table 7.8. Bitterley - Quarter ending Christmas 1840

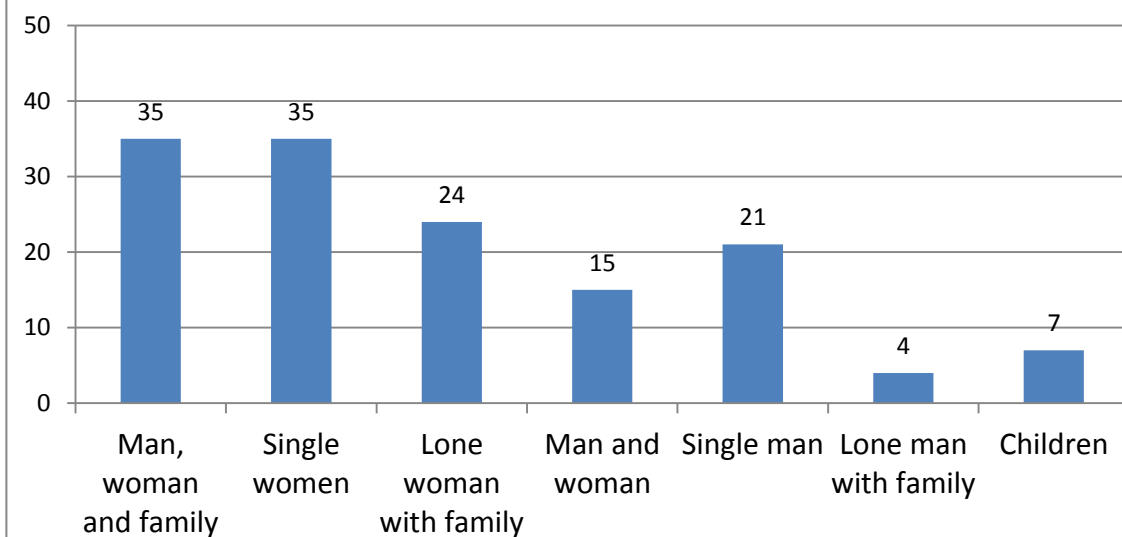
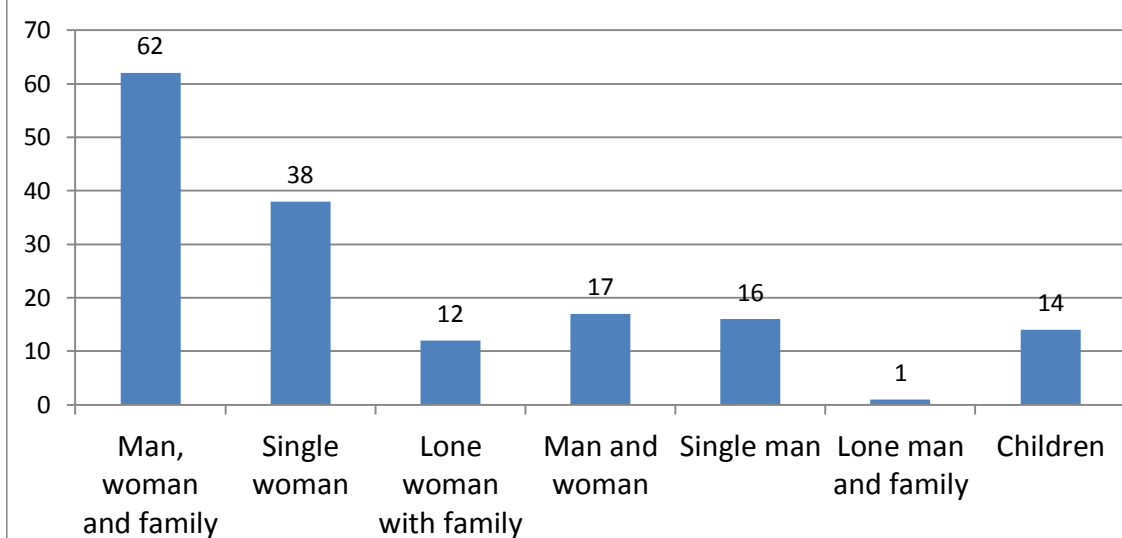
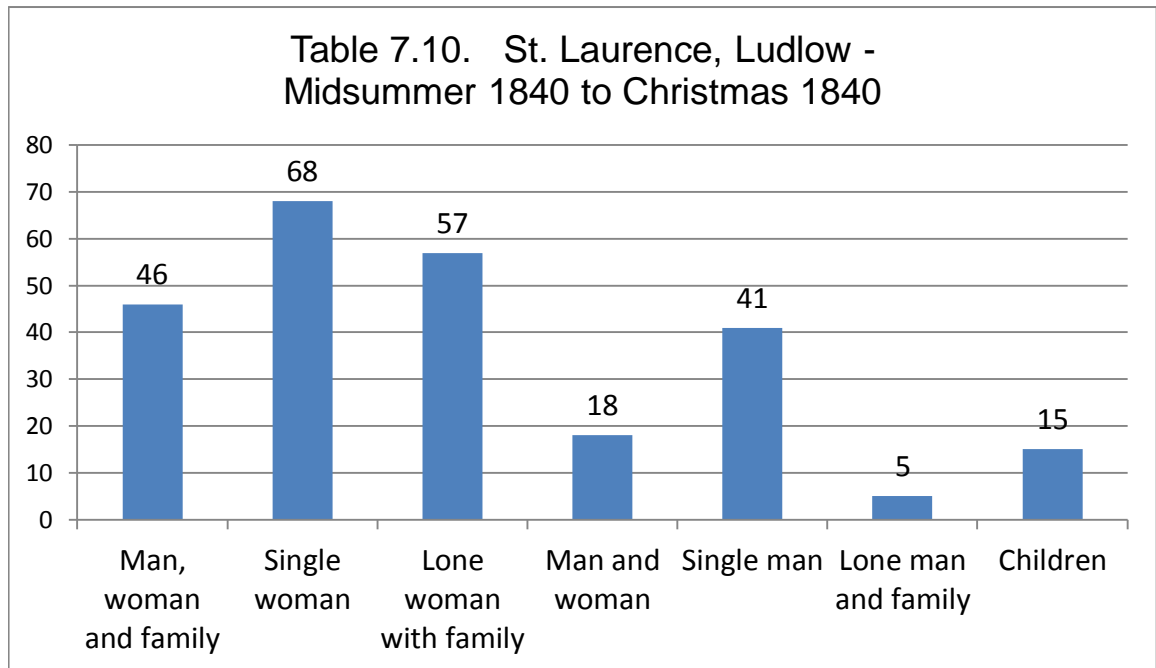


Table 7.9. Diddlebury - Quarter ending Lady Day 1841





The nature of the request for relief

Tables 7.11 to 7.15 analyse the nature of the request for relief, in order to identify what form of relief was wanted. Sometimes more than one type of relief was requested such as medical relief and also financial relief or relief in kind while the applicant was ill. Where two requests were made both have been identified, but separately. To ask for new relief means that you are currently not receiving any relief. If there was a request for extra relief the applicant was already receiving permanent (reviewed every few months) relief, but needed more temporarily. Temporary relief was only given for a finite time, such as two or four weeks and 'continuation of relief' means a request was made to continue the temporary relief for another period. The category marked 'Workhouse' occurs where either the relieving

officer or the Workhouse Master has identified a suitable person to enter the workhouse or had already admitted such a person, and needed the admission agreed by the Guardians.

Table 7.11. Bitterley - Quarter ending
29th September 1840

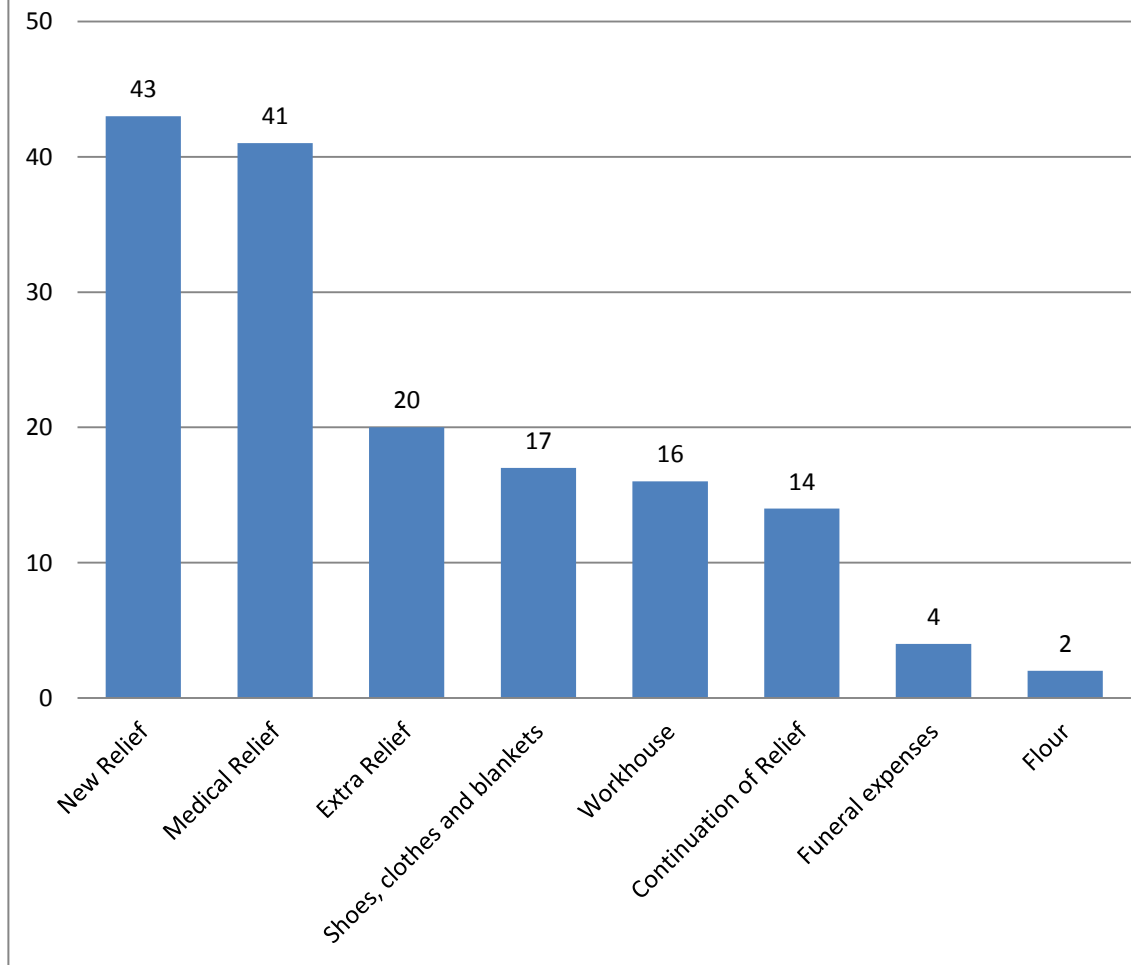


Table 7.12 - Bitterley - Quarter ending
Christmas 1840

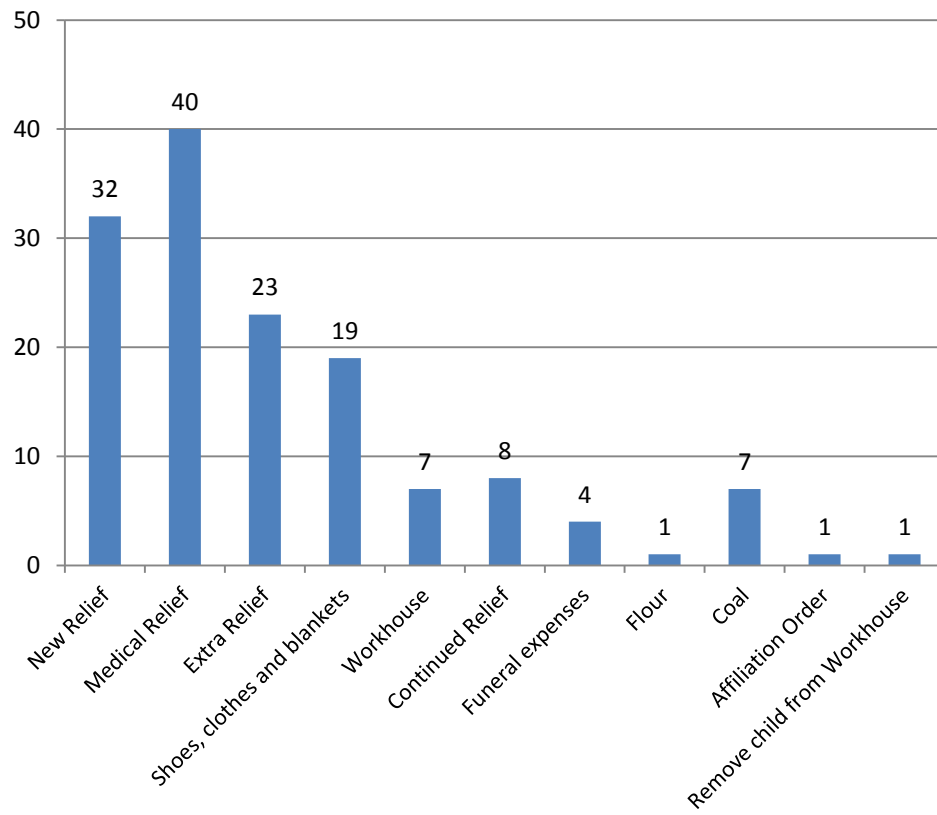


Table 7.13 Diddlebury - Quarter ending
Christmas 1840

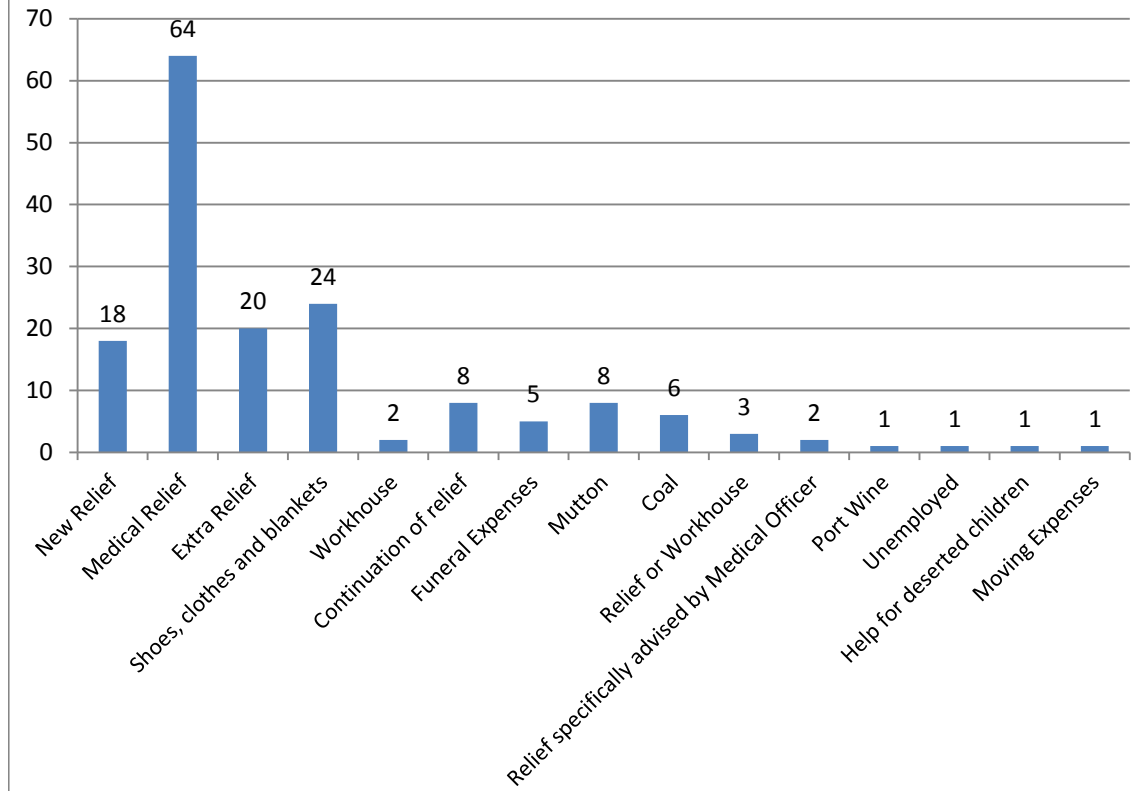


Table 7.14 Diddlebury - Quarter ending
Lady Day 1841

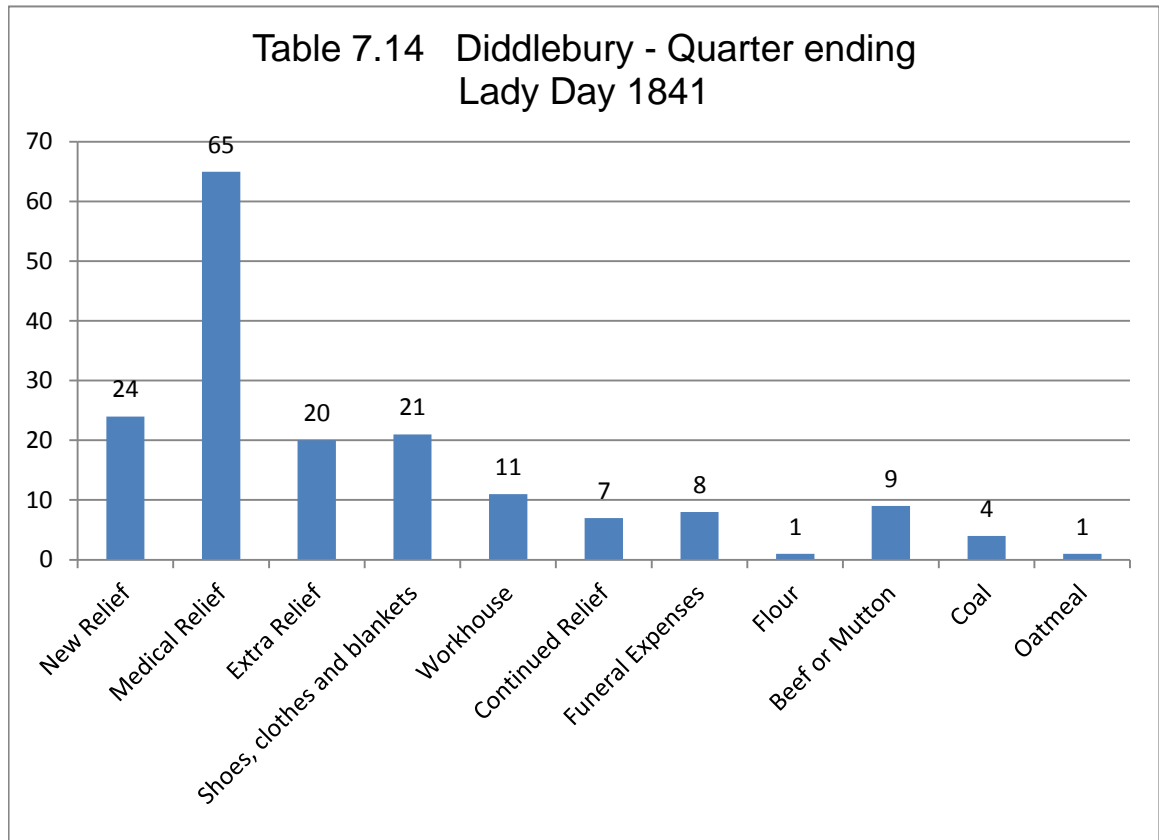
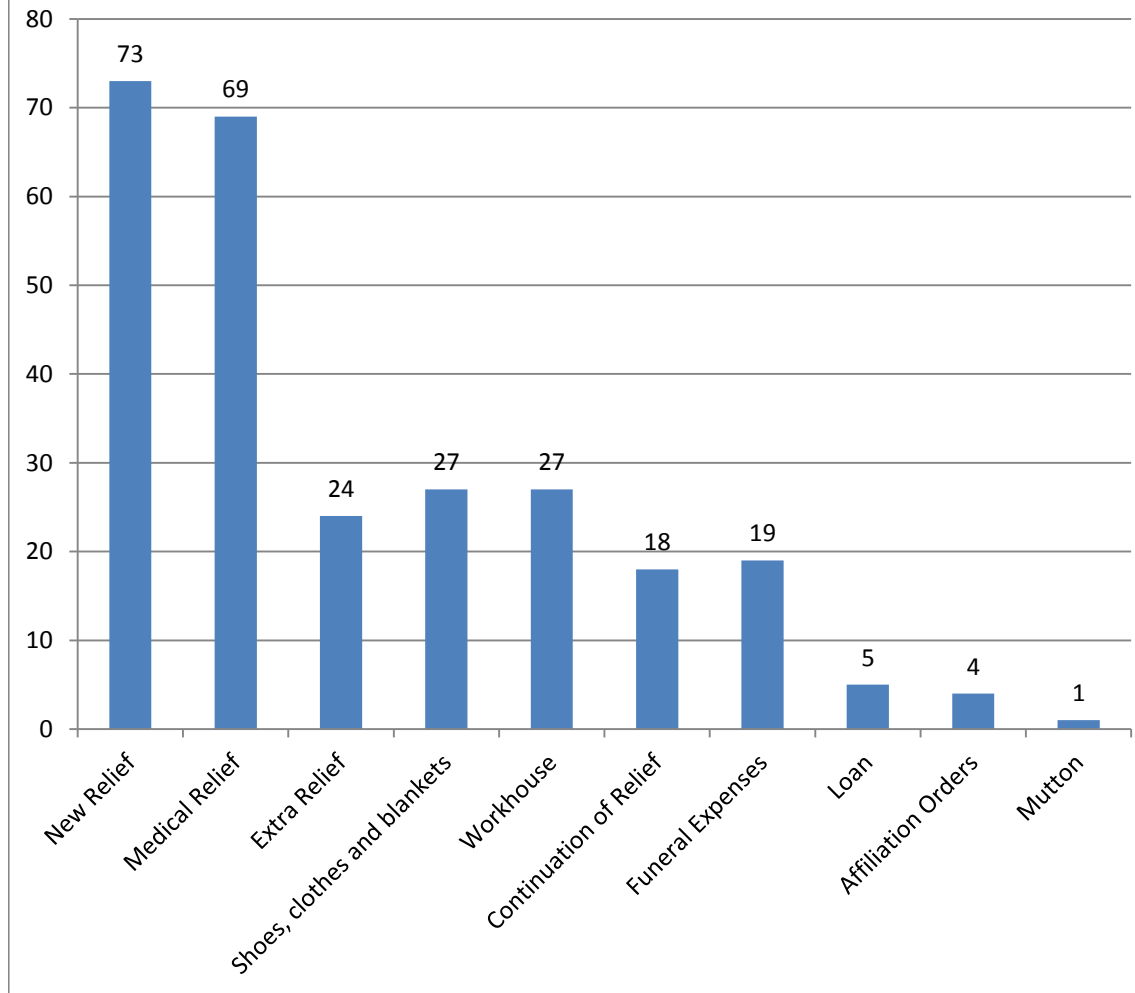


Table 7.15. St. Laurence, Ludlow - Midsummer to Christmas 1840



Results of Relief Applications

Tables 7.16 to 7.20 analyse the result of the relief applications, and identify how many requests were granted fully, or fully in kind, or granted partially (generally at least half granted), or refused, or deferred, or offered the Workhouse instead.

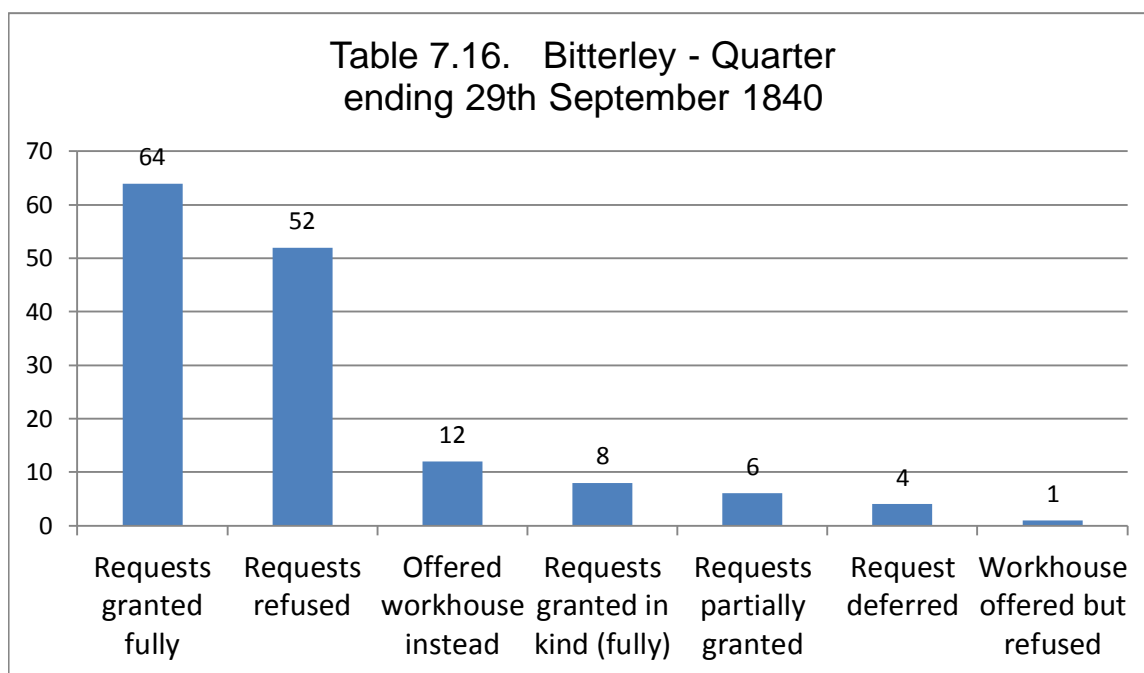


Table 7.17. Bitterley - Quarter ending Christmas 1840

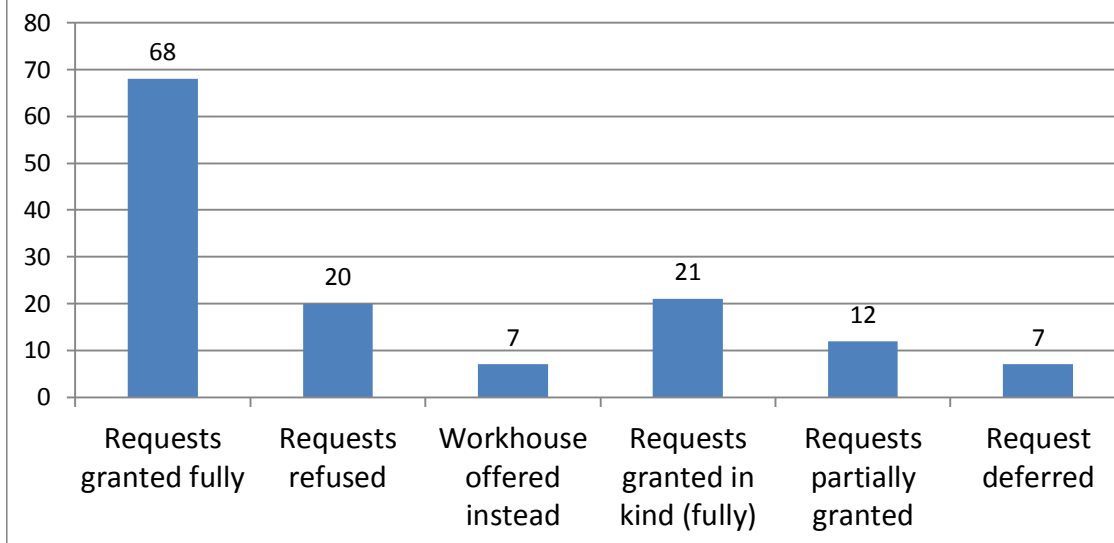


Table 7.18. Diddlebury - Quarter ending Christmas 1840

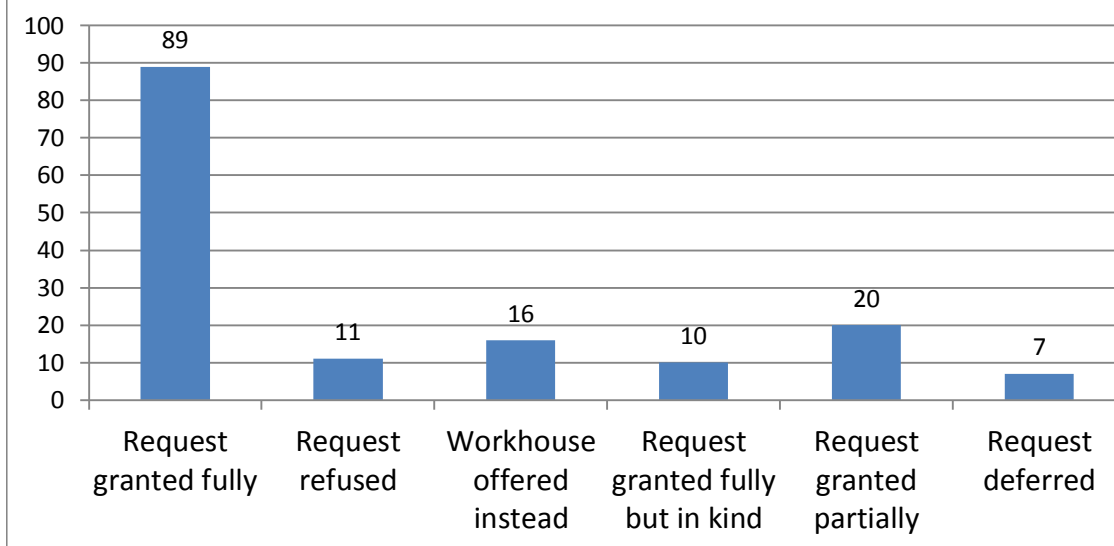


Table 7.19. Diddlebury - Quarter ending
Lady Day 1841

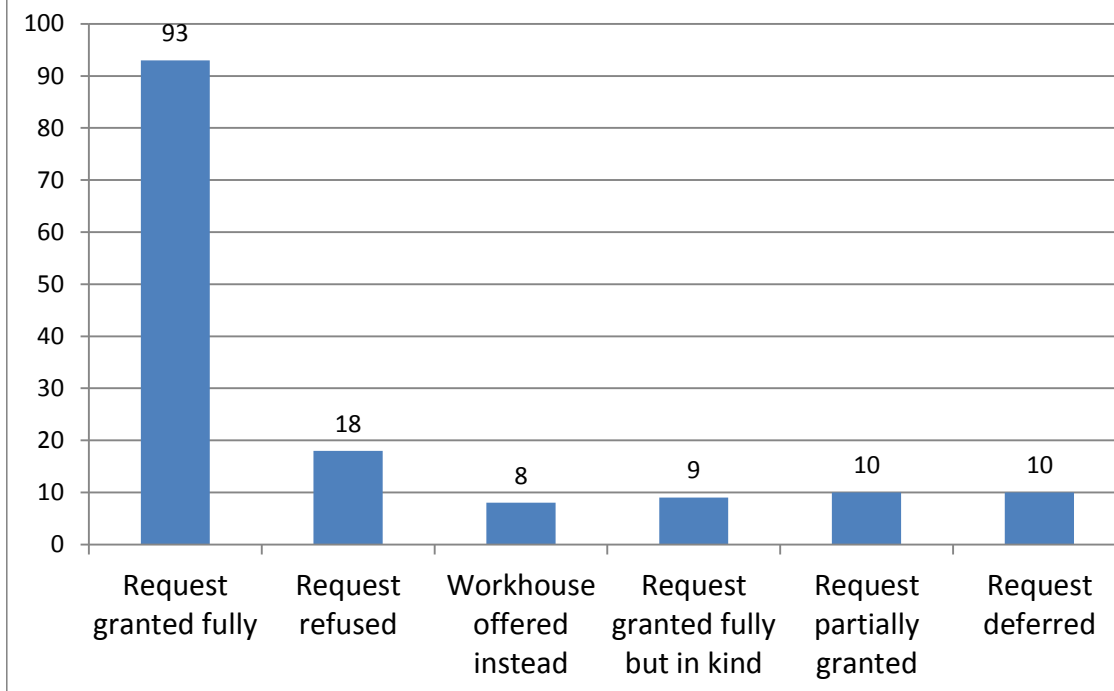
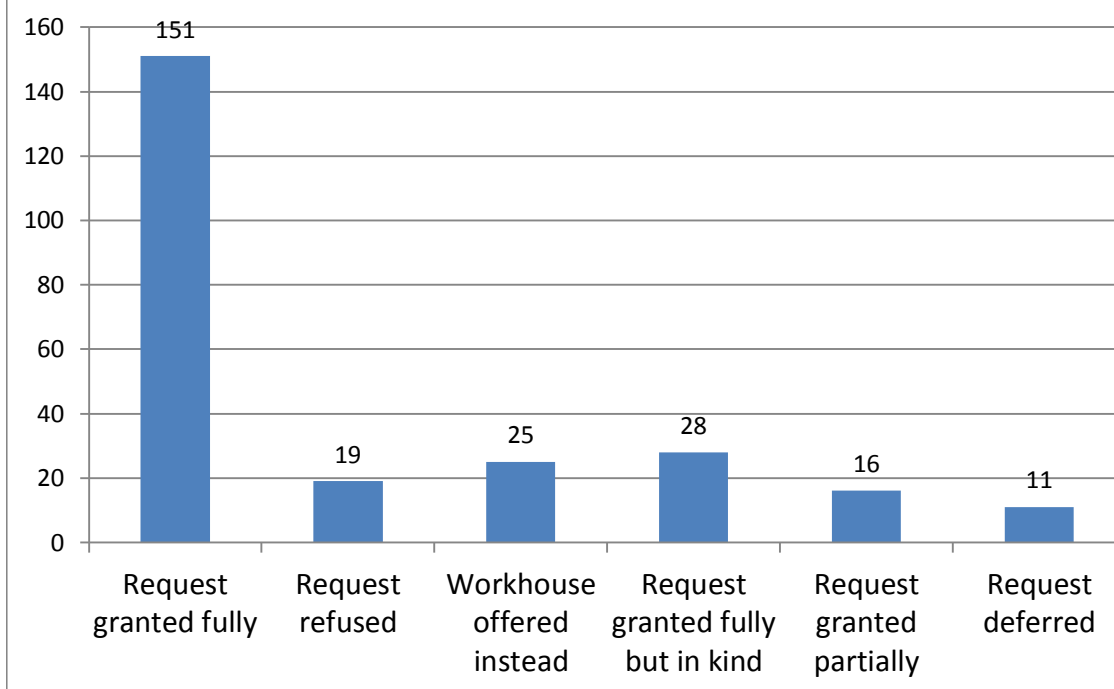


Table 7.20. Ludlow - Midsummer 1840
to Christmas 1840



From the documentary evidence it is clear that the Ludlow Guardians dispensed both permanent and temporary relief to a high proportion of applicants. The workhouse was never even close to being full during this period and the paupers admitted to the workhouse were generally the old, disabled, young, and women with bastards. Tables 7.16 – 7.20 show that only a small proportion of applicants for relief were offered the workhouse.

The significance for poor children of the data contained in these graphs is considerable. Firstly, in Tables 7.2 to 7.6 there were relief applications on behalf of children who were orphaned or deserted. Since almost all applications were allowed in full or in part then that would have benefitted lone children and also children in families. Tables 7.7 to 7.10 show that approximately half of relief applications were from families including children.

Out-relief in other Shropshire Unions

The Commissioners moved swiftly in their desire to eliminate or heavily reduce out-relief. In 1835 they issued directives prohibiting out-relief to able-bodied people in work and half the out-relief to the able-bodied unemployed was to be in kind, and by 1838 the Shropshire Unions had received these orders.⁷⁷⁶

In other Shropshire Unions differences of expenditure and priorities emerged very soon. By 1840 Atcham expenditure *per capita* of its population was significantly below Ellesmere's. By 1849 Ellesmere's expenditure was 6s. 9d. and Atcham's only

⁷⁷⁶ TNA: MH 32/15, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, Wales and Shropshire, 1838, William Day to the Poor Law Commission, 9th January 1838.

4s. 2d. per capita though they followed similar fluctuations year on year while the difference remained generally the same.⁷⁷⁷

Ellesmere only appointed one Relieving Officer for what was a reasonable sized union with an elongated shape. Its shape and size made it impossible for one Relieving Officer to superintend the whole Union. The Ellesmere Union subverted the aims of the 1834 Act by continuing to use parish overseers as the first contact for paupers and the decision-maker on relief to paupers.⁷⁷⁸

Ellesmere had a significant problem with expenditure which consistently increased their *per capita* spending. That problem was the result of settlement and county-wide migration patterns. Many residents of what became Ellesmere Poor Law Union had migrated to the industrial unions, Madeley and Wellington, and had become dependent on relief because of age, infirmity or disability, but still retained a settlement in Ellesmere. It would be expensive to remove these paupers to Ellesmere, and then have to support them, and so the Ellesmere Guardians decided it was easier to support its out-of-union paupers where they resided, but Ellesmere only had one Relieving Officer with no time to investigate the condition of paupers outside the Union. The Guardians of the other Unions had no incentive to energetically examine Ellesmere's paupers if they had no financial responsibility for them so there was a strong possibility of unaccountable expenditure on the out-of-union paupers. The appointment of only one Relieving Officer by the Ellesmere Guardians is of more than passing interest. Lord Kenyon, the leading landowner in the Ellesmere Union territory, had a strong belief in the parish as the best local unit for the distribution of

⁷⁷⁷ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in Shropshire 1820 – 1855' (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1979), p. 295.

⁷⁷⁸ TNA: MH 32/14, Correspondence with Commissioners and Inspectors, Wales and Shropshire, 1835 – 1837, Clerk of Ellesmere Union to the Poor Law Commission, 23 August 1837.

poor relief, and so the Union decided to maintain paid assistant overseers in most parishes.⁷⁷⁹

Because they were salaried and because there was only one Relieving Officer in Ellesmere Union and one relieving station, it seems very likely that the parish assistant overseers were used as surrogate relieving officers and they investigated relief applications and distributed relief.⁷⁸⁰ From the point of view of the Poor Law Commission this must have been a problem, since local overseers were more likely to find it easy to relieve parishioners who were their neighbours. To the Commission, poor relief being allocated by a fairly distant Board of Guardians with a workhouse at their disposal would lend objectivity to the poor relief process, and therefore reduce the level of relief. These two factors, the payments to non-resident paupers, and high payments to resident paupers may be the reason for Ellesmere's high per capita expenditure.

The Atcham Guardians did not record their appointment of Relieving Officers but clearly did appoint them because they recorded the amounts paid to those officers to reimburse them for payments made to paupers.⁷⁸¹ They set up two districts, one based at Atcham and one at Ford. The setting up of only two Relieving Districts in a Union of over 40 parishes and geographically extensive was symptomatic of a Union determined to make outdoor relief a difficult option for the poor.

At the time of the formation of the Atcham Union it had 1,006 outdoor paupers.

Similarly to Ellesmere, Atcham was close to the coalfield and the ironworking Unions of Madeley and Wellington and that was one reason for the large number, since many

⁷⁷⁹ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in Shropshire 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 254 – 255.

⁷⁸⁰ TNA: MH 12/9935, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Ellesmere Union, 1834 – 1842, Clerk of the Ellesmere Union to the Poor Law Commission – 2/7/38.

⁷⁸¹ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 20 November 1837, p. 70.

paupers relieved by Atcham lived in the industrial Unions. On taking office the Guardians found that 25% of outdoor relief was paid to non-residents.⁷⁸² In stark contrast to Ellesmere, the Atcham Guardians adhered strictly to the Commission's order refusing new applications from non-resident paupers. They then removed able-bodied men from the non-resident list immediately. If the non-resident, non-able-bodied paupers lived relatively close by they sent a Relieving Officer to examine the claimant. In other cases the Guardians asked other Unions to visit the claimants and report on them. In this way Atcham achieved a two-thirds reduction in payments to non-resident paupers within a few years.⁷⁸³

The records do not enable us to measure the specific impact on children of Atcham's attitude to non-resident paupers. At times the effect of poor relief policies on children can only be measured obliquely via effect of their policies on adults. It is extremely likely that reduction of payments to Atcham's non-resident paupers would have affected children adversely.

Of the new non-resident applicants that Atcham refused to relieve, seventy-three were removed to Atcham because they still wanted relief. Of these seventy-three only twelve remained on relief when living in Atcham.⁷⁸⁴ Those Atcham non-residents who were deemed irremovable because of severe illness were given relief by Atcham in their Union of residence. Atcham also decided not to pay paupers' rents, a pre-1834 tradition in the parishes that formed the Union.⁷⁸⁵ The Atcham

⁷⁸² TNA: MH 12/9822, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, Atcham Union's 16 page report to the Poor Law Commission, setting out the Union's policies and how it planned to implement them, 21 May 1838.

⁷⁸³ TNA: MH 12/9824, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1843 – 1850, Clerk of the Atcham Union to the Poor Law Commission, 1846.

⁷⁸⁴ TNA: MH 12/9823, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1839 – 1842, William Day to the Poor Law Commission, November 1839.

⁷⁸⁵ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in Shropshire 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, p. 303.

Union Report of 1838 stated that there was a subsequent decline in rents by 10 or 15%.⁷⁸⁶ The Guardians also attempted to contact claimant's relatives to persuade them to contribute to relief. The able-bodied were always offered the workhouse unless they were seeking medical relief. Many rejected the workhouse offer and left empty handed. On occasions Baldwyn Leighton, the Chairman of the Union, spoke to able-bodied men who appeared honest but had rejected the workhouse and suggested where employment might be found. As Union Chairman and a major landowner Leighton may have had influence with other farmers.⁷⁸⁷

In the eighteenth century industry was centred around Coalbrookdale, on both banks of the River Severn. This was later to become part of the Madeley Union. In the final decades of that century the centre of Shropshire industry moved farther north to the parishes of Wellington, Wombridge and Wrockwardine, all later to be in the Wellington Union. When the Poor Law Unions were formed this operated to Madeley's advantage, because many workers in Madeley's mines and factories had not achieved settlement in Madeley so took to Wellington their original, often rural, settlement. Madeley paid less to paupers than Wellington, as measured by cost per capita of population, partly as a result of the lack of non-resident paupers.⁷⁸⁸ Also Wellington's poor relief costs were high because they continued to give relief to the able-bodied during the early years of the Union, effectively ignoring the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order. The relief was channelled through parish overseers, who gave relief to able-bodied men receiving low wages or who were unemployed up until 1841. This flouting of the law was detected by Assistant Commissioner Gilbert and

⁷⁸⁶ TNA: MH 12/9822, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Atcham Union, 1834 – 1838, Atcham Union Report 1838, 21 May 1838.

⁷⁸⁷ F. C. Childe (ed.), *Extracts from the Letters and Speeches of Baldwin Leighton*, p. 26.

⁷⁸⁸ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in Shropshire 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, p. 310.

he reported it to the Poor Law Commission. He also revealed that the relief payments made by parishes were hidden in accounts other than poor relief. Gilbert also accused Wellington of being casual in offering outdoor medical relief on dubious grounds.⁷⁸⁹

When these paupers relieved by parishes had their illegal payments stopped they approached the Guardians, who continued to offer outdoor relief to non-able-bodied, and offered medical relief to the able-bodied applicants. The cost of workhouse provision was rising at the time, so sending paupers to the workhouse was becoming more expensive than hitherto. In these circumstances, the Wellington Guardians preferred to offer outdoor relief.⁷⁹⁰ The Guardians also gave medical relief to able-bodied paupers, still as an alternative to the workhouse.⁷⁹¹ However, from the summer of 1842 they adhered to the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order.⁷⁹² In August they wrote to the Poor Law Commission that their workhouses were full due to the industrial recession and therefore all new applicants would have to receive outdoor relief. The Poor Law Commission accepted the difficulty of Wellington's position but Assistant Secretary to the Poor Law Commission Lumley wrote to the Guardians arguing that able-bodied paupers should perform a manual task in return for relief. He also wanted relief to be in kind.⁷⁹³ Initially the Guardians arranged for able-bodied paupers to work on local estates, particularly those of the Duke of Sutherland,

⁷⁸⁹ TNA: MH 12/10060, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1841 – 1842, William Gilbert to Poor Law Commission, 8/11/41 27/11/41 18/4/42.

⁷⁹⁰ TNA: MH12/10060, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1841 – 1842, William Gilbert to Poor Law Commission, 8/11/41.

⁷⁹¹ TNA: MH12/10060 Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1841 – 1842, William Gilbert to Poor Law Commission 18/4/41.

⁷⁹² The Outdoor Relief Prohibitory order prohibited outdoor relief to able-bodied men and women except in exceptional circumstances. Effectively, Boards of Guardians decided what was exceptional.

⁷⁹³ TNA: MH 12/10060, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union,, 1841 – 1842, Lumley to Wellington Union 19 August 1842.

the Duke of Cleveland and Lord Forester, and also found tasks with road constructors, by working in quarries.⁷⁹⁴

The new Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, Alfred Power (who replaced Gilbert in East Shropshire), advised the Guardians that tax-payers' money should not be used to fund work on private estates.⁷⁹⁵ The Guardians then tried to provide work repairing public roads and approached the Road Commissioners who were repairing Watling Street, the Roman road running from Shrewsbury, through Wellington towards the Midlands. The work was at Bennetts Bank, and was expected to require a considerable amount of labour and the Road Commissioners would be in charge of the work. The Union provided relief for the workers according to this scale:

man, wife and one child	6s. 6d. per week
man, wife and two children	7s. per week
man, wife and three children	7s. 6d. per week
man, wife and four children	8s. per week
man, wife and five children	8s. 6d. per week
man, wife and six children	9s. per week. ⁷⁹⁶

The Guardians also told Richard Snook, the foreman of the road works, that he was to avoid employing single men and able-bodied married men without children unless more workers were needed. The decision to find work for able-bodied paupers initially on the large estates may have been misconceived, but showed that the

⁷⁹⁴ TNA: MH 12/10061, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1843 – 1845, Wellington Clerk to the Poor Law Commission, 5 February 1843; SA: PL 14/10, Wellington Union Minute Book, 1839 - 1843, 5 January 1843, p. 345.

⁷⁹⁵ TNA: MH 12/10061, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Wellington Union, 1843 – 1845, Assistant Commissioner Power to the Poor Law Commission, 21 February 1843.

⁷⁹⁶ SA: PL 14/2/2/10, Wellington Union Minute Book B, 1839 – 1843, 27 April 1843.

Unions were keen to provide useful work for paupers.⁷⁹⁷ The decision to pay paupers to work on repairing Watling Street is qualitatively different to work on private estates and indicates that the Union saw the need to help families, rather than single men or childless couples. The scale of relief paid, while it was not as high as market rates for an agricultural labourer, was generous compared to the usual payments of out-relief at the time in the county. At the same time, the work on local estates and Watling Street did ensure that welfare payments were based on a task of work.

This weighty evidence shows that Wellington was committed to out-relief as the means of meeting needs of the poor. Like Madeley, Wellington felt no need to spend large sums of money on a new, prestigious workhouse, preferring the pragmatic approach via out-relief. The Wellington Guardians also housed and educated its child paupers at its farm school at Ercall Magna. The two main industrial Unions, Madeley and Wellington took a different approach to most Shropshire Unions (generally rural) in avoiding expenditure on expensive workhouse buildings, allowing them to channel money into out-relief payments. Was this symptomatic of an industrial community with a pragmatic problem-solving ethos?

In Madeley during the early 1840s the Guardians encouraged mine owners and factory organisers to employ paupers.⁷⁹⁸ They also sent a letter to Parliament arguing against a Bill which planned to limit the employment of children and women in mines.⁷⁹⁹ The Guardians felt that children's and women's wages were vital to families at a time of industrial downturn. They asked the Commission to allow them to relieve able-bodied applicants at home since the workhouses were full. The

⁷⁹⁷ SA: PL 14/2/2/10, Wellington Union Minute Book B, 1839 – 1843, 1 June 1843.

⁷⁹⁸ V. J. Walsh, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in Shropshire 1820 – 1855', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, p. 318.

⁷⁹⁹ SA: PL 10/3, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1840 – 1845, 8 July 1842, pp 180 – 183.

Commission agreed but wanted a task of work to be given as a test of the pauper's genuine need.⁸⁰⁰ The Madeley Guardians either found it too difficult to devise a work programme or they made no effort to devise one. William Day, now again an Assistant Commissioner, criticised the Guardians because they 'lacked firmness'.⁸⁰¹ In this context lacking firmness was synonymous with showing sympathy to the poor, since during an industrial recession the able-bodied were not generally responsible for their own lack of employment. Day criticised the Union for giving the able-bodied relief without a work task, though the Guardians wrote to the Poor Law Commission lamenting their inability to find suitable, and worthwhile, tasks. What the Guardians did do, was to allow the families of able-bodied paupers to leave the workhouse as long as the head of the family remained in the workhouse. This allowed room for other able-bodied relief applicants. Several of the new able-bodied applicants subsequently refused the workhouse or left it after a few days, and thus lost all relief.⁸⁰²

In summary, children did not apply for relief in their own right, because they were viewed by the Commission and the Unions as dependent on adults. Occasionally orphans or deserted children were looked after by relatives or other adults and the interests of those children *vis-à-vis* relief payments were managed by those adults. Generally it was indicated in the Unions' papers that an adult was claiming on behalf of children not his/her own. Poor children were affected by the administrative approach of Unions in dispensing out-relief and that has been illustrated in the Ludlow relief tables. For instance, those tables showed that only a small percentage of

⁸⁰⁰ TNA: MH 12/9981, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Madeley Union, 1834 – 1842, Correspondence between Madeley Clerk and Poor Law Commission, 16 May 1842 – 24 May 1842.

⁸⁰¹ TNA: MH 12/9982, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Madeley Union, 1843 – 1847, William Day to the Poor Law Commission, 12 April 1843.

⁸⁰² TNA: MH 12/9982, Poor Law Union Correspondence, Madeley Union, 1843 – 1847, Madeley Clerk to the Poor Law Commission, 1 July 1843.

claimants who applied for relief, left empty handed. Many applicants for relief were heads of families. The data shows approximately 50% of applicants for relief involved families with children or orphaned or deserted children.⁸⁰³

The part of the chapter dealing with Unions other than Ludlow does not explicitly mention children, but it does illustrate some of the factors which affected scales of out-relief and therefore affected children. It shows that Ellesmere's appointment of only one Relieving Officer made it more difficult to assess Ellesmere's paupers in other Unions, so out-relief for Ellesmere non-union residents continued. The use of parish officials to deal as surrogate relieving officers may have helped paupers and their families gain out-relief since parish officials may well have known applicants as present and future neighbours and therefore were unwilling to fuel village social tensions. In contrast Atcham tried hard to reduce out-relief and was successful, so families with children were forced to survive without relief or had to enter the workhouse. Wellington, like Ellesmere, delegated some responsibility for relief to parish overseers and created make-work systems targeted towards large families. Madeley declined to spend money on a new prestigious workhouse thus potentially releasing funds for out-relief, and they also approached the unemployed able-bodied in a manner more in keeping with the Old Poor Law.

The third part of the chapter strikes at the heart of the out-relief issue, by focussing on the amount of out-relief paid to families with children, or orphaned or deserted children.

⁸⁰³ Tables 7.7 – 7.8, Bitterly District, show that 47% of applicants were families with children, or orphaned or deserted children.
 Table 7.9, Diddlebury District, shows that 55% of applicants were families with children, or orphaned or deserted children.
 Table 7.10, St. Laurence, Ludlow District, shows that 50% of applicants were families with children, or orphaned or deserted children.

The overwhelming evidence is that of the Unions in the vale of the northern Severn, clear fault-lines emerged in the late 1830s and early 1840s in their relief spending. Atcham concentrated on developing its workhouse and its reduction of out-relief. Madeley and Wellington continued to view out-relief as their primary vehicle for relief, sometimes illegally, and decided not to allocate resources to new workhouses. Ellesmere used parish overseers to act as Relieving Officers, thus subverting the Poor Law Amendment Act. In effect, Madeley, Wellington and Ellesmere continued with Old Poor Law attitudes to poor relief

Choice of Union and Overview of Data

This section will provide analysis of data from Application and Report Books. The Unions chosen for this task are Madeley, Atcham and Ludlow. The three Unions were chosen because they provided a geographical spread, and a contrast between industrial and rural, and different approaches to giving relief. Madeley was chosen because it was typical of a largely industrial Union, though it did include some agricultural areas between Ironbridge and Much Wenlock, south of the River Severn. Atcham was chosen largely because it was the largest Union in Shropshire and consisted of a central belt of land across the middle of the county. It would have been logical for Shrewsbury to be the central town of the Atcham Union, but the Shrewsbury Incorporation refused to become a Union or join the one at Atcham, so Atcham was left without a central town. Its workhouse was in Cross Houses, a small village on the road between Shrewsbury and Much Wenlock. In contrast Ludlow, which is the third Union chosen, was typical of the classic design of rural Poor Law

Unions, with a market town (Ludlow) surrounded by several parishes in a roughly circular shape. It was located in the south of the county.

Data was obtained from Application and Report Books or Abstracts of the same. For each Union data was taken from one or more Application and Report Books (dependent on the number of transactions in each book) of each Union during the 1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. Thus it is possible to compare the data horizontally, by comparing outdoor relief across the three Unions in the four decades from the 1830s to the 1860s. It is also possible to compare the data vertically in each Union, by comparing outdoor relief policies over the four decades within each Union. Some of the data was available in the full Application and Report Books in which there are some details of the applicants and the Relieving Officer's investigations. When only the Abstract of the book is available the data is only in a restricted form with just short details of the applicant and the action taken.

Accompanying each graph is a commentary, which is designed to give a description of the entries in the Application and Report Book that are not included in the graph and comments from the Returning Officer or Guardians. For the sake of clarity each graph is an analysis of financial and 'in kind' transactions when they are given a monetary value. The number of transactions in each graph varies according to the number of applicants. To equalise the number of applicants for all graphs would have meant in some cases extending the data over more than one decade. Some of the Application and Reports Books do not include requests for medical relief, whereas some do include that. The transactions that are analysed are only those that involve children, sometimes as part of a family, sometimes as deserted children and

sometimes as orphans. Thus payments to adult individuals or couples without children are not included.

The Application and Report Books were completed by the Relieving Officers in a fashion which suited them and their Poor Law Union. Even though the Books were uniform and designed centrally for the specific purpose, different Relieving Officers and Unions completed them differently. Thus it is not always obvious when a payment is 'in kind' or in money. Sometimes it is abundantly clear which it is, and sometimes it can be deduced. For instance, a Union which offered relief in multiples of 6d. is likely to be using money. When the amount of money described in the book is not uniform but contains amounts such as 1s. 4d., 2s. 2d. or 3s. 3½d. it may well be that a specific amount of produce was offered, like a pint of wine, or a peck of flour and for accounting reasons has been converted to a cash equivalent.

Payments in kind were considered useful by central authorities because they prevented relief becoming an allowance in support of wages, they added another disincentive to claimants, and they avoided relief being spent in ways of which the central authorities would disapprove, such as in ale houses. For Relieving Officers it was a cumbersome system with many inconveniences. Suppliers had to be negotiated with, goods had to be transported, stored, preserved and monitored as to quality. In Shropshire Unions provisions bought for workhouse consumption were sometimes adulterated, so suppliers were not above exploiting the Poor Law bureaucracy. If paupers were given tickets to exchange for goods in local shops, it would be easy for shopkeepers to take advantage of vulnerable paupers who might have been grateful for anything, however sub-standard the quality.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁴ K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging* (Cambridge 2006), p. 226.

The three Unions chosen do have individual characteristics in the manner in which they offer relief. Atcham in the 1830s only offered 7% of the claimants more than 3s. This was consistent with their commitment to reducing the out-relief bill. In the 1840s they offered more than 3s. to 11% of claimants, so there was a slight increase. There was another increase to 16% above 3s. in the 1850s, but in the 1860s there were not enough out-relief transactions to ensure accuracy.

Even though Atcham had a commitment to the primacy of the workhouse and the lessening of out-relief the Guardians occasionally showed pragmatism when extra help was required by paupers. For instance, in January 1838 there was a period of severe weather and the Atcham Guardians increased payment to single paupers by 6d a week and families of 2 or more people by 1s. a week. At the same time they decided to exclude 'idiots' and 'bastards'. The minutes do not indicate the reason for the exclusions, but this could have been a compromise between hardliners and moderates on the Atcham Board.⁸⁰⁵ The next month the Medical Officer persuaded the Board to buy a dozen bottles of port wine for use of out-relief paupers, and they decided to maintain the extra out-relief payments. The extra 1s. 0d. a week for families would have beneficially affected children and poor families.

Also in the Atcham Minutes of January 1838 it is clear from examining the amounts reimbursed to Relieving Officers that they had increased by over 100% during the two weeks before Christmas. Assuming that the money reimbursed was for relief expenditure the Christmas payments to paupers also increased by over 100%. This is not commented on in the minutes, but the Union clerk would have been aware of the payments and the Guardians, enthusiastic as they were to limit out-relief, agreed

⁸⁰⁵ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 29 January 1838, p. 83.

the re-imbursement amounts.⁸⁰⁶ In the same period there was an exhortation to Relieving Officers and Medical Officers to arrange for pauper children to be vaccinated.⁸⁰⁷ The Guardians also declared that no relief should be given to children for clothing.⁸⁰⁸ These two decisions appear to be contradictory, one decision to vaccinate children and another to deny clothing to children. The Atcham Guardians had a strong sense of purpose so presumably didn't perceive these decisions as contradictory. Possibly there was a fear that children's clothing would be sold or pawned.

In 1846 they also granted extra relief to all claimants because of the failure of the autumn potato crop and bad weather.⁸⁰⁹ They also increased relief in the winters of 1853/54 and 1854/55 because of bad weather.⁸¹⁰ In 1857 there was a large increase in food prices and that resulted in a general increase in relief. This is evidence that Atcham Guardians recognised that their policy of limiting out-relief payments had to be suspended during difficult times.

In Madeley payments of relief were comparatively generous. In the 1840s nearly 50% of claimants received over 3s. and in the 1850s 45% did the same. The Union did not automatically admit women with bastards to the workhouse and receiving money from a club did not automatically debar a claimant from obtaining relief. Also, paupers leaving the workhouse received outdoor relief. Particularly for children they offered the school at Quatt as a reason to receive indoor relief and they paid 'school pence' after Denison's Act. They also paid for shoes and clothes for children.

⁸⁰⁶ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 1 January 1838, p. 77. The Relieving Officers dispensed money to applicants, and that money was reimbursed to Returning Officers at the next Board meeting.

⁸⁰⁷ SA: PL 1/2/2/3, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1851, 23 October 1847, p. 66.

⁸⁰⁸ SA: PL 1/2/2/1, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1836 – 1840, 19 June 1837, p. 41.

⁸⁰⁹ SA: PL 1/2/2/3, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1845 – 1851, 12 January 1846, p. 14.

⁸¹⁰ SA: PL 1/2/2/4, Atcham Union Minute Book, 1851 – 1857, 19 December 1853, p. 48; 15 January 1855, p. 71.

The Ludlow Workhouse was the first to be built in Shropshire after the Poor Law Amendment Act and it received its first inmates in May 1839. In the early years the Union was not generous with out-relief and only 5% of claimants received more than 3s. It may be that in the early days the Ludlow Guardians lacked a very powerful local figure like Baldwyn Leighton, Robert Slaney or William Wolryche Whitmore and so perhaps were in awe of the Poor Law Commission. They decided not to relieve the able-bodied except in the case of illness. They sent very few to the workhouse at first but that was at the time when the old poor houses were winding down and the new workhouse was being built. By the 1840s the Guardians had perhaps understood their local strength *vis-à-vis* the central authorities, and 43% were offered out-relief above 3s., which was a large increase from the 1830s figure. About 10% of claimants were offered the workhouse. Large payments were made for medical reasons and mothers with illegitimate children were not automatically sent to the workhouse. In the 1850s 49% of claimants received above 3s. Also men receiving money from clubs received relief. The Applicant and Relief Books at the time indicate a generous (in relative terms) approach to out-relief.

By the 1850s Ludlow had travelled a long way from the spirit of the 1834 Act. In the year ending Spring 1850 the cost of outdoor relief was £4,232 and the cost of in-maintenance was £604. Thus the Ludlow Union was spending seven times more on out-relief than in-maintenance.⁸¹¹ Out relief costs peaked in 1856 at £4,662.⁸¹² In 1866 the Guardians set up a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Bowles, the Vicar of Stanton Lacy, to look at the administration of relief in the Union. That committee issued a report indicting the Union for spending more on out-relief than

⁸¹¹ SA: PL 9/3/8/1, Ludlow Union Financial Return, March 1840.

⁸¹² SA: PL 9/2/1/11, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1865 – 1869, Report of the Bowles Committee, 19 April 1866, p. 108.

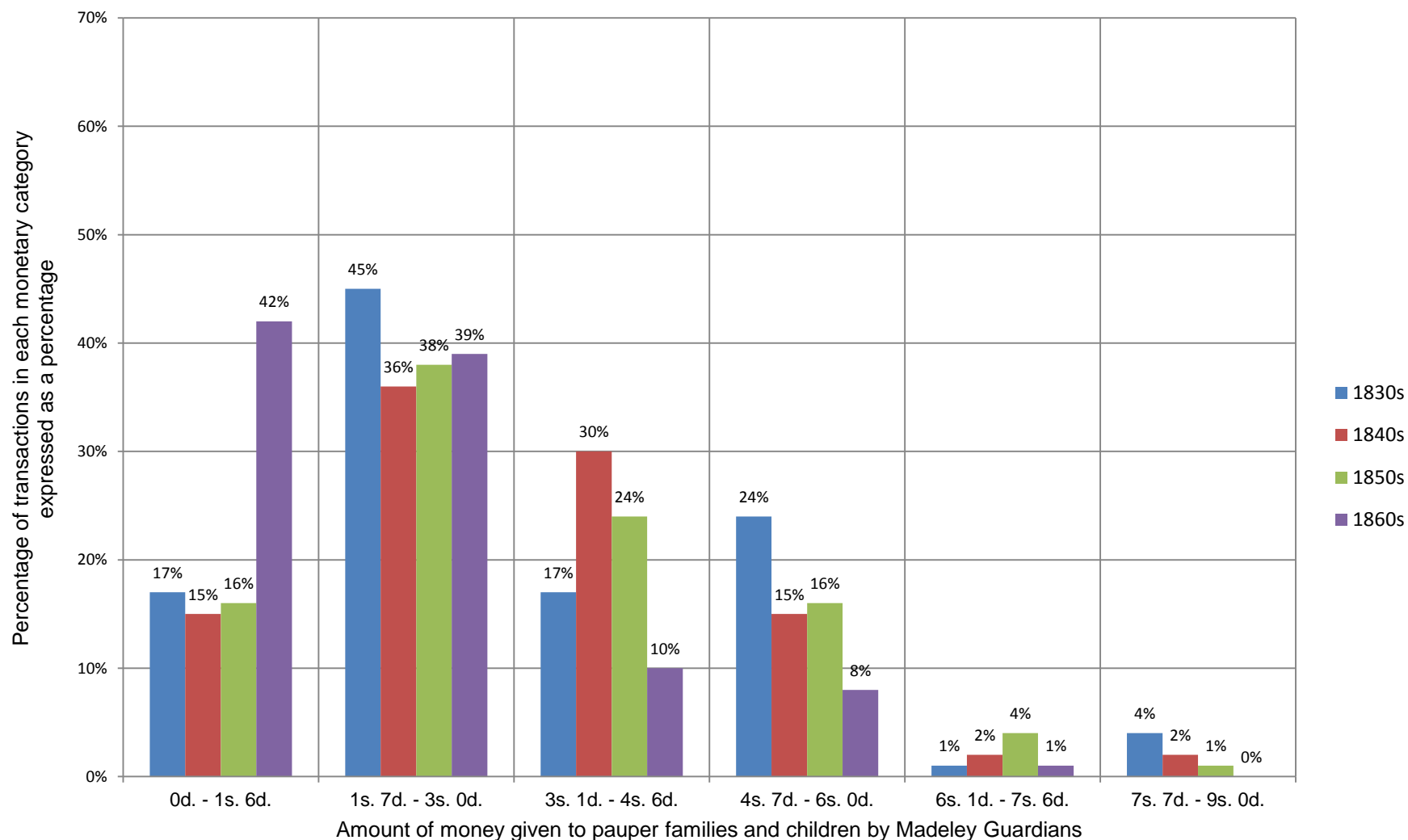
any other Union in Shropshire. It contrasted the level of pauperism in the Ludlow Union (6% of the population) with Atcham (1.4%). Applying for relief and receiving it was effectively declaring oneself a pauper, so Dr. Bowles' accusation was that Ludlow relieved 6% of the Union population whereas Atcham Union relieved 1.4% of its population. The implication was that if Atcham was used as the standard, the Ludlow Union was too generous. Atcham pursued a vigorous policy of discouraging out-relief and relied on the workhouse to accommodate paupers.⁸¹³

The Bowles report caused much acrimony among the Guardians resulting in threatening behaviour, accusations and the temporary resignation of the Chairman. The long term result, though, was that outdoor relief expenditure began to decline after the publication of the Report. By the 1860s there were 58% of claimants above 3s. but the large payments became rarer and many of the payments were then in the middle bands. The proportion offered the workhouse was 9%. The Guardians offered a great deal of money to pay 'school pence'.

The Commentaries on individual graphs include analysis of the evidence that can be deduced from the graphs alone. Alongside the data in the Application and Report Books there is data and information which cannot be shown on the graphs, including other payments made to paupers, the number refused relief and those offered the workhouse, applications for medical relief and indications of Guardian attitudes and policies.

⁸¹³ SA: PL 9/2/1/11, Ludlow Union Minute Book, 1865 – 1869, 8 March 1866, p. 86; 22 March 1866, p. 90.

Table 7.21. Payments to families and children in Madeley Union -
1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1860s



Commentary on Madeley Application and Report Book

1836 - 1839⁸¹⁴ (in blue on above graph)

The first two columns of the graph show the number of paupers receiving relief in the two lowest bands (0d. – 1s. 6d. and 1s. 7d. – 3s). These columns show that 62% of successful applicants received up to 3s. per week. That seems ungenerous until that figure is compared with Atcham and Ludlow which both awarded up to 3s. to 93% of applicants. Of the Madeley applicants 45% received between 1s. 7d. and 3s. 29% received more than 4s. 7d. (the comparative figures for Atcham are 1% and Ludlow 2%). Of the three Unions examined Madeley was significantly more generous than Atcham and Ludlow. This could be a reflection of a Board of Guardians which was close to its community, or it may be the result of Madeley being a (relatively) high wage area because of industrialisation, or being unwilling to use the workhouse, because it was an inappropriate means of relief in a high wage, high levels of employment area. Madeley had only a substandard workhouse until 1874 when they built anew. In addition to standard relief payments, there were five payments for clothes and shoes, and one for a nurse. The eleven families refused relief were a mixture of cases involving people with no settlement in Madeley or who received money from a club.

One of the striking differences between Madeley and the rural Unions is the number of industrial workers receiving help from a club, compared to very few in the rural areas. Sickness or mutual clubs were much easier to organise in industrial areas with large numbers of workers within a small area, in contrast to widely distributed

⁸¹⁴ SA: PL 10/85, Madeley Union Relieving Officers' Records, 1836 – 1844.

farm workers. Also membership of a club or friendly society would have been more manageable on industrial wages like 15s. or 16s. a week, as shown in the Application and Report Book. Of the 128 transactions only one family was immediately offered the workhouse. This suggests that the Union did not regard the workhouse as the first resort and that it had a commitment to out-relief.

One family which received 6s. had the comment attached 'until school is established' perhaps indicating that the children would be brought into the workhouse when the school was organised. This indicates that the Guardians saw the workhouse school as a future service to child paupers, rather than the workhouse (of which the school was a part) being viewed as a deterrent.

Commentary on Madeley Application and Report Book

1846 - 1849⁸¹⁵ (in red on above graph)

On one measure Madeley's payments are very similar to the 1838 graph, in that the number receiving relief up to 3s. is 51%, which is 1% lower than the previous graph. However, payments between 3s. 1d. and 9s. have moved towards the higher amounts. Also, many of the lowest payments (0s. – 1s. 6d.) were at the top end of the band and based on the price of a peck of flour, which was approximately 1s. 4d.

At this time Madeley Union sent its children to Quatt School near Bridgnorth (see Chapter 4, Education in Shropshire Workhouses). In the early 1850s, the Guardians specifically offered Quatt School to eight children and specifically offered the

⁸¹⁵ SA: PL 10/66, Madeley Union Relieving Officers' Records, Broseley District, 1849 – 1854 and PL 10/90, Madeley Union, Abstract of Application and Report Books, 1846 – 1849.

workhouse to eight other children. There is not enough detail to make a judgment as to why the workhouse was specified (instead of the school). It may be the children were not of a suitable age to attend the school, or that workhouse was a convenient word pending a final decision as to the child's education. It may have been that the Union was reluctant to pay to send a child to Quatt if the child's stay was likely to be only a short one. Sarah Corfield with four children was offered relief for a fortnight, after which one child should go to the school at Quatt.⁸¹⁶

Benjamin Hartstone was offered Quatt 'as soon as he has his wooden leg finished to him'.⁸¹⁷ Thomas Bradly was allowed 3s. temporarily per week as he had just left the workhouse. For the Union 3s. weekly relief was more economic than looking after him in the workhouse. Some Unions would not have given out-relief to someone leaving the workhouse.⁸¹⁸

Of the 68 transactions 5 families were offered the workhouse. A woman with two illegitimate children was given a choice by the Guardians, either all 3 would be offered the workhouse, or only one of the children. This is an example of negotiation by the Union and an attempt to ease the woman's plight. It was not recorded what decision she made. One woman with 4 children was given 1s. per week and 1 peck of flour (value 1s. 4d.) until her husband 'comes out of gaol'.

There were many examples of claimants being offered relief 'during illness'. Twenty shillings was given to the aunt of two orphans 'who had taken charge of them' and this was later increased to 30s. when she took charge of three orphans. Wages for

⁸¹⁶ SA: PL 10/66, Madeley Union Application and Report Book, 1849 – 1854, 24 June 1853.

⁸¹⁷ SA: PL 10/66, Madeley Union Application and Report Book, 1849 – 1854, Quarter ending Lady Day, 1853, 25 March 1853.

⁸¹⁸ SA: PL 10/66, Madeley Union Application and Report Book, 1849 – 1854, Quarter ending 25 March 1850.

young boys were recorded as between 5d. and 11d. per day with a 15 year old earning 1s. 1d. a day.

Commentary on Madeley Application and Report Book

1854 - 1857⁸¹⁹ (in green on above graph)

This graph is little changed from that of the mid-1840s. There were 132 payments offering relief to families and 8 families had their application declined. The graph shows that Madeley Guardians had moved away from the lowest level of relief (up to 1s. 6d. per week) towards the middle range of payments with 62% of payments between 1s. 7d. and 3s. 6d. per week. Eight families were refused any assistance, compared to 132 payments of general relief. Two orphans who had a Madeley settlement but lived at Bilston were awarded 30s. for shoes and clothes, which appears to be generous, particularly as they were non-resident.

When offering in-maintenance the Guardians drew a distinction between school and workhouse. Fifteen families were offered the workhouse and twelve other children were offered Quatt School, housed near Bridgnorth, which was very successful at that time. For the families of some of the children offered Quatt School, the Guardians offered relief until the child/children went to the school.

In addition the Guardians paid 'school pence' enabling six children to attend a local school. They also provided money for clothes and shoes and gave 8s. for blankets to an imbecile who regularly destroyed her clothes. In addition they offered a pair of

⁸¹⁹ SA: PL 10/32, Madeley Union Relief Order Book, Madeley District, 1854 - 1859.

bedsteads from the redundant Broseley workhouse to a family. Eleven families were given funeral expenses which in the case of the two Bywater children cost 20s.

Commentary on Madeley Application and Report Book

1869⁸²⁰ (in lilac on above graph)

This graph shows a movement towards reduction in the amount of relief compared to the 1850s. Payments in the lowest band have increased from 16% in 1854 – 1857 to 42% in 1869. There were 143 transactions in PL10/37 and the workhouse was offered to twenty-five families which is 18% of the number of relief applicants. This statistic is curious because 18% of applicants offered the workhouse is a large percentage, and also the Belmont Road Workhouse in use at the time had been the subject of much discussion between the Union and the Poor Law Board about its dilapidation. With the Guardians refusing to build a new workhouse, in 1867 the Poor Law Board limited the capacity to 91 persons.⁸²¹ Notwithstanding this, in 1869 the Guardians ordered the workhouse master to get as many paupers ‘as can conveniently be accommodated’ into the workhouse.⁸²² In addition to this there were two families offered 1s. 5d. weekly (probably a peck of flour) ‘till room in the House’. There is some evidence of bad winters in the 1860s, but not particularly towards the end of the decade. Nor was there an economic depression at the time. The need to fill the workhouse may have more to do with the architectural/political dispute the Madeley Guardians had with the Poor Law Board. The Board postponed the closure

⁸²⁰ SA: PL 10/7, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1866 – 1872, 30 August 1867, p. 42.

⁸²¹ SA: PL 10/7, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1866 – 1872, 30 August 1867, p. 42.

⁸²² SA: PL 10/7, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1866 – 1872, 10 September 1869, p. 260.

of the Madeley workhouse several times, and the Guardians may have wanted to keep the workhouse full to prevent its closure and the expense of replacing it.⁸²³

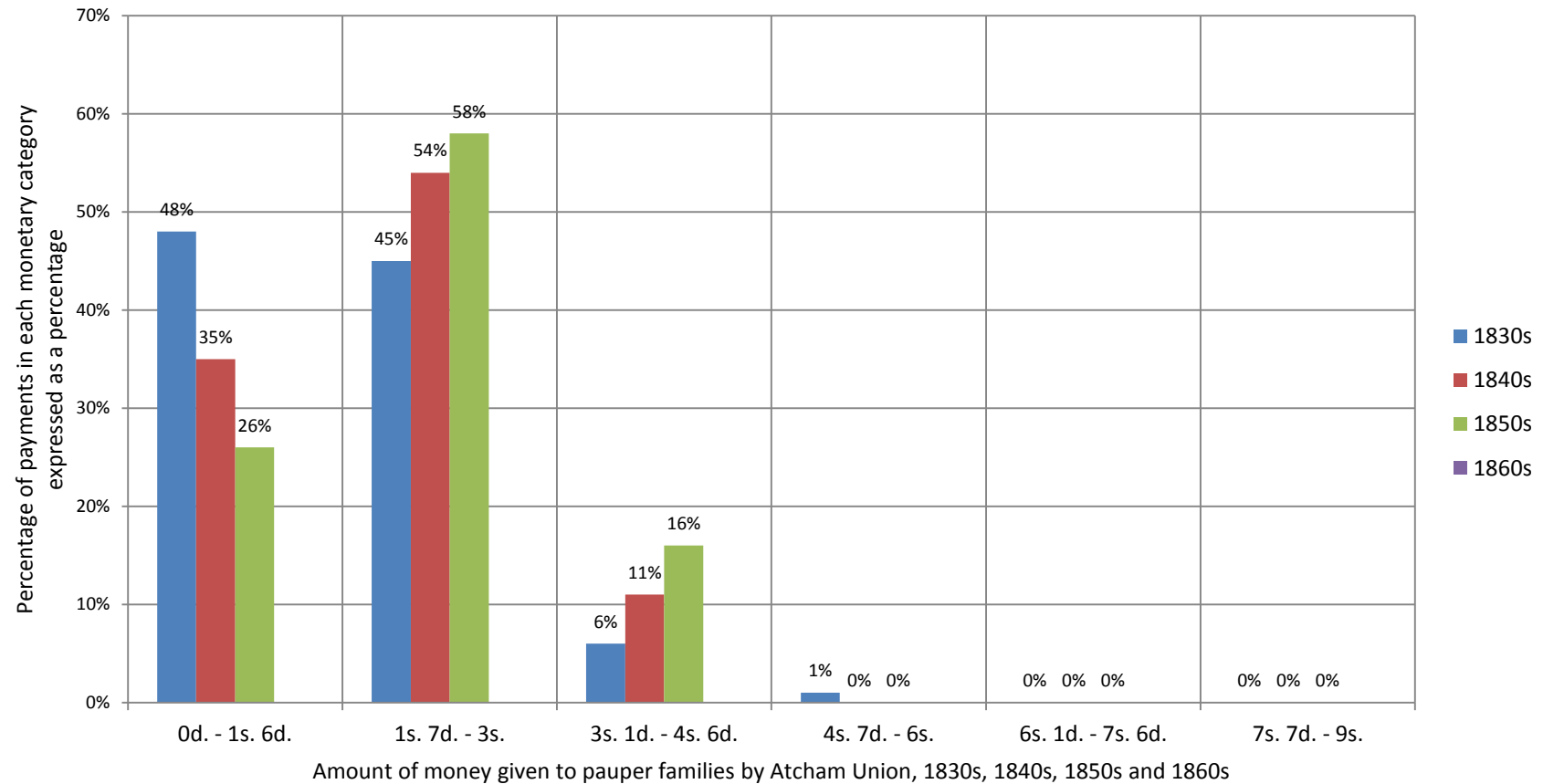
The new workhouse was built at Lincoln Hill, Ironbridge in 1874.

Hardly any relief was given solely in cash, some was given entirely in kind, but the majority of payments were a mixture of both cash and in kind. Relief was refused for 15 applicants (9%) and stopped for 36 applicants (22%). There could be many reasons for relief to be stopped or refused, but alongside the reduction in the size of relief payments and an increase in the number offered the workhouse it seems to be indicative of a change of attitude of the Madeley Guardians.

'School pence' was paid on 46 occasions, often substantial sums like 10s. indicating that they were payments for several weeks. There were also children offered a place at the South East Shropshire School at Quatt. Three families were supported while adult males were away in the militia.

⁸²³ SA: PL 10/7, Madeley Union Minute Book, 1866 – 1872, 10 September 1869, p. 260.

Table 7.22. Payments to families and children in Atcham Union,
1830s, 1840s, 1850s



1837 - 39 – 276 transactions

1843 – 1847 – 155 transactions

1856 – 78 transactions

1860s – too few transactions for an accurate graph

Commentary on Atcham Application and Report Book

1837 - 1839⁸²⁴ (in blue on above graph)

The graph shows that Atcham's payments were heavily biased towards the lower end with 48% up to 1s. 6d. per week, and 93% up to 3s. Only three families had relief refused and two families had their relief stopped.

There were 276 transactions involving money for general relief, and in contrast 9 complete families were offered the workhouse. 'Complete' is an important word because many children were taken into the workhouse, while the rest of the family stayed out. The general pattern was for the family to apply for relief, the Guardians to allow 1s. 6d for a week with the additional note that one or more children from that family should enter the workhouse. A total of 72 children in families were taken into the workhouse without their parents. What motivated the Guardians to do this? They certainly wanted to change the balance between outdoor and indoor relief in favour of reducing out-relief, so that was accomplished by this policy. By taking away children of destitute families, the Guardians made it less likely that these families would ask for relief, and were less likely to be offered it if they did apply or would be offered a smaller amount. There are two separate cases in which a mother with children remarried and the children from the first marriage were taken into the workhouse.

Guardians' comments in the Abstract of the Application and Report Book reveal three themes prevalent in Atcham Guardians' thinking, namely a determination to use relief as a method of changing moral habits, a view of childhood which perceives the child

⁸²⁴ SA: PL 1/16/7/2, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1837 - 1839.

as a contributory cause of family poverty, and a view of work or education as a method of preventing inherited pauperism. In one case the Guardians expressed the opinion that a child had been badly brought up and should come into the workhouse 'to be better taken care of'. This is echoed in another case where the child lived in a lodging house and (in the Guardians' view) was badly brought up. The parents were told that relief (currently 1s. 6d.) would cease unless the girl was sent to the workhouse. In another case the parents were advised that their 12 year old must either be 'got out' (sent to work) or sent to the workhouse. On occasions the workhouse school was mentioned as a reason for a child to go into the workhouse. In early 1838 an observation on a child reads 'offer the workhouse on account of the schoolmaster' and another observation made the same declaration of support for the workhouse school: 'ten year-old to come into House for schooling'. A widow with a 12 year old was denied relief unless her child was 'got out' or sent to the workhouse. However the Guardians had a view of how old a child must be to be 'got out' because one family sent a young child into service and the Guardians increased the family's relief to 2s. because 'the child too small to keep her situation'. Perhaps they didn't offer the workhouse to the child because the parents had obtained the favour of the Guardians by acquiring a situation for their daughter however unsuitable.

Commentary on Atcham Union Application and Report Books

1843 - 1847⁸²⁵ (in red on above graph)

With 89% of payments at 3s. or below, Atcham was not generous with relief. There were 155 transactions involving financial or in-kind relief at home and only 6 entire families were offered the workhouse. This is 3% of the total. In addition to that, though, there were six occasions in which the workhouse was offered to children of families, presumably to relieve the financial burden at home. There is evidence suggesting that the Atcham Guardians thought highly enough of their school that they considered children would benefit from workhouse education. While Atcham had a determination to remove out-relief from able-bodied applicants, they had a different view towards families, as evidenced by only 3% of applicants with children being offered the workhouse. While Atcham Guardians strongly supported the principles of the Poor Law Amendment Act the evidence suggests that they viewed their workhouse as providing benefit beyond merely deterrence.

The Guardians often noted that the eldest children of an applicant family should be 'got out', indicating placed in service or other paid employment. That enabled more money to be brought into the household or a dependent removed from it, thus making it less likely that the family needed to receive Union support. There were also remarks in the Application and Report Book indicating a cross-referencing in their attitudes between poverty and morality. A 28 year old woman had 3 children but had a husband in the asylum. Initially they allowed 2s. 6d. a week, but 2 months later the Relieving Officer reported that she was pregnant. Guardians began to enquire

⁸²⁵ SA: PL 1/16/7/4, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1843 – 1846 and PL 1/16/7/7/5, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1846 - 1851.

whether her husband was the father. In another case Mary Griffiths, a widow with four children had relief stopped 'owing to bad character' and was offered the workhouse instead. This was a case where the workhouse was seen by Guardians as a punitive measure for unspecified bad character traits. Both these cases indicate willingness of the Guardians to impose moral attitudes when the opportunity arose.⁸²⁶

Commentary on Atcham Union Application and Report Book

1856⁸²⁷ (in green on above graph)

At this stage the comments in the Atcham Application and Report Books were becoming increasingly terse. Of the payments to families and deserted or orphaned children the graph shows that there has been very little increase in payments since the 1840s. The number on the lowest band of relief had declined from 35% to 26% but there were no payments above 4s. 6d. unlike Madeley and Ludlow. The picture of Atcham Union is still one of an ungenerous Union. The book does not have many comments indicating the character of the Union or the views of Chairman or Clerk. What comments there are, confirm many of Atcham Union preoccupations. One comment indicated the importance they attached to smallpox vaccination.

Another comment identified the rent paid by a pauper as too high, and it is known from his speeches that Baldwyn Leighton often spoke to landlords about reducing rents for paupers. There are occasions on which the Union offered the workhouse to

⁸²⁶ It is significant that the Guardians morality only applied to women and this confirms Anna Clark's view that the New Poor Law treated men and women according to different standards. Anna Clark, 'The New Poor Law and the Breadwinner Wage: Contrasting Assumption', *Journal of Social History*, (Winter 2000), pp. 261 - 281.

⁸²⁷ SA: PL 1/16/7/6, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1851 - 1856.

the eldest child or children in the family seeking relief. The Union used children entering the workhouse, or going out to service as an opportunity to reduce relief. The Union continued to see itself as an enforcer of moral standards, at least for women. Hannah Burgwin was a widow with two children aged 9 and 7. When she applied for relief she was given some but the Chairman asked the Medical Officer to report on her possible state of pregnancy. Presumably her husband had died some while ago. The Medical Officer confirmed the pregnancy and relief was then discontinued. A few months later she entered the workhouse.

Commentary on Atcham Union Application and Report Books

1865 - 1869⁸²⁸

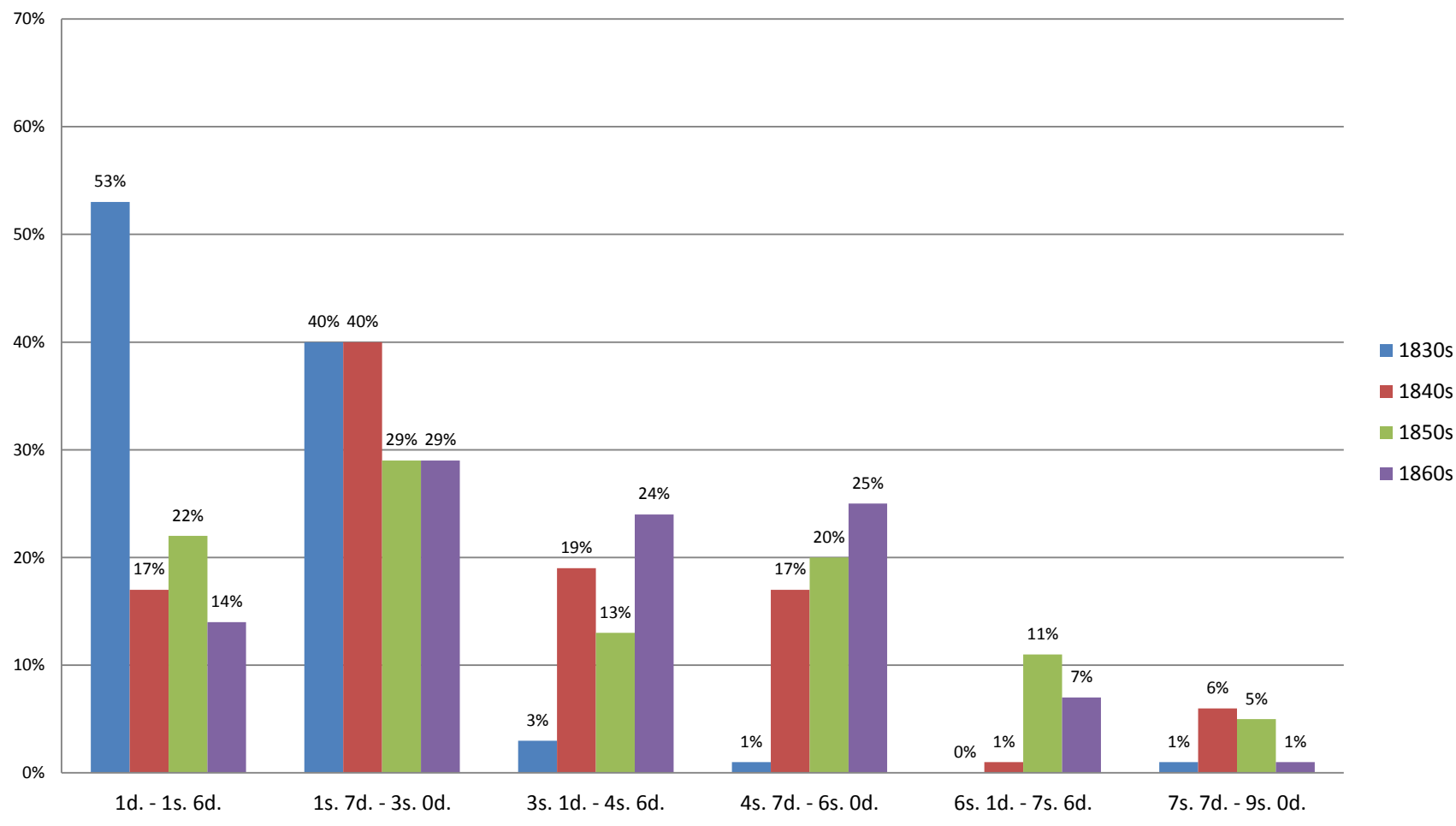
It was impossible to compile a graph with any degree of accuracy because there were few families recorded applying for relief and the relief was almost always entirely in kind, and described as (for example) 3 lbs. of mutton or 6 lbs of meat and a peck of flour, without a cash equivalent, even though there is a column in the Application and Report Books to record the cash equivalent. Generally Shropshire Union Report Books described a cash equivalent to the relief in kind, thus making it easy to define the monetary value of relief. There were not enough entries where the amount of money (or cash-equivalent of goods) was identified to allow conclusions to be accurately drawn on the level of relief.

⁸²⁸ SA: PL 1/16/3/3, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, March 1869; PL 1/16/4/6, Atcham Union Application and Report Book, 1868; PL 1/16/3/4, Atcham Poor Law Union, Application and Report Book, Atcham District, 1869; and PL 1/16/3/2, Atcham Poor Law Union, Application and Report Book, Atcham District, 1865.

If an applicant with a family applied for relief, the Union response was often to offer the workhouse to one or more of the children in the family while leaving the parent(s) and often younger children outside the workhouse, with or without outdoor relief. The workhouse was offered to eight whole families and was also offered to children (but not adults) from nine other families. The Guardians offered the workhouse to pairs of siblings from seven families, and to one family they offered the workhouse to three children, and to four children from another family. This is a continuation of the Atcham Guardians' policy to lessen the burden on the parent(s) of the family by removing one or more of the mouths to feed, and bodies to clothe, or was it designed to persuade parents against applying for relief or was it a perception that they could offer the children education leading away from inherited pauperism?

The small number of applicants for relief may be because claimants were recorded elsewhere or dissuaded from applying by relieving officers, or alternatively perhaps claimants had a negative perception of Union policies (built up since 1836) and looked for survival strategies elsewhere. The Atcham Application and Relief Books examined (PL 16/3/3, PL 16/4/6, PL 16/3/4 and PL 16/3/2) span four years but record only 28 applications, whereas Ludlow in 1868 received 188 applications in a shorter time.

Table 7.23. Payments to families and children in Ludlow Union,
1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1860s



Commentary on Ludlow Union Application and Report Book

1839⁸²⁹ (in blue on above graph)

The graph shows that payments were very low with 53% receiving up to 1s. 6d. and 93% receiving up to 3s.

As is common with Ludlow Union there are 28 requests for medical relief. Almost all of those were requests to see the Medical Officer, and at least four from working breadwinners asking for medical relief for family members. All medical requests were granted except two in which the Relieving Officers expected to receive a medical certificate but none was forthcoming. The Relieving Officer recorded wage levels showing an adult male wage to be approximately 9s.

One of the 9s. earners with a wife and seven children asked for clothes for his eldest child (probably because she had a situation) and was refused 'being against the law – relief to an able-bodied man not allowable by the Board' (Union clerk's comments.)⁸³⁰ Had the man claimed his daughter was ill he may have been more successful. Frederick Fletcher had a request for relief refused, but three weeks later his wife was ill and he then received relief.⁸³¹ It was common for Ludlow Guardians to provide clothes for a child and a 10 year old boy was given 20s. for clothes for a situation. A 7 year old orphan was granted 4s. 6d. for shoes, though he already received relief at 1s. 6d. per week.⁸³² The Guardians were equivocal regarding mothers with illegitimate children. On one occasion a mother and a 9 month old bastard were told they could only be relieved in the workhouse, but on another occasion a woman with three illegitimate children had lately left the

⁸²⁹ SA: PL 9/24/8/1, Ludlow Union Records of Relieving Officers, Diddlebury District, June 1840.

⁸³⁰ SA: PL 9/24/8/1, Ludlow Union Records of Relieving Officers, Diddlebury District, June 1840, p. 14.

⁸³¹ SA: PL 9/24/8/1, Ludlow Union Records of Relieving Officers, Diddlebury District, June 1840, p. 18.

⁸³² SA: PL 9/24/8/1, Ludlow Union Records of Relieving Officers, Diddlebury District, June 1840, p. 16.

workhouse with out-relief. Normally people voluntarily leaving the workhouse were expected to fend for themselves, but she asked for 6s. for herself and the children and was allowed 3s. money and 3s. in kind.

Five applications were refused, two of which were from wage-earners requesting seed potatoes. Only four families were offered the workhouse out of 70 transactions.

Commentary on Ludlow Union Application and Report Book

1848⁸³³ (in red on above graph)

Compared with the Ludlow 1839 graph there had been movement towards more generous relief. The lowest band of relief (0s. – 1s. 6d.) had been reduced by two-thirds and the bands (3s. 1d. – 6s.) had risen considerably. Forty-three percent of applicants received more than the 3s., compared with the 1839 figure of 5%. There were also some large payments made including three payments of 20s. to able-bodied men. One man's wife was having a baby and it was probably a difficult delivery involving a Medical Officer. The other man earned 10s. a week but received 1s. relief and 20s. because his daughter had a dislocated arm. The same amount (20s.) was paid to an able-bodied man (earning 8s. a week) where an 11 year old child had a broken arm. Payments of 40s. and 10s. were also paid for medical care to able-bodied men. The Union had salaried Medical Officers who were paid by the Union an agreed rate for extra work such as operations and difficult deliveries, so these large payments are hard to explain, but indicate that the Ludlow Guardians were positive about providing medical relief. There were 35 applications requesting medical relief and all were granted. The evidence

⁸³³ SA: PL 9/24/10/17, Ludlow Relieving Officer Records, Clee Hill District, 1847 – 1848 and PL 9/24/11/5, Ludlow Relieving Officer Records, Diddlebury District, March to June 1845.

shows that being independent labourers in employment still qualified one for Ludlow Union medical relief.

The Relieving Officer generally records the reason for a claimant's relief request, and with an able-bodied labourer (in work) with a wife about to give birth and 4 children, the reason for the request is written 'his earnings not being sufficient for the family'. He was initially granted 4s. a week, later reduced to 2s. This seems strikingly similar to the allowance system condemned in the 1834 Report and subsequently, and indicative of the Ludlow Guardians perceiving the need to financially support poor working people.

Commentary on Ludlow Union Application and Report Books

1858 - 1859⁸³⁴ (in green on above graph)

The graph shows some polarisation of payments in that the number of applicants receiving payments in the lowest bands had increased as had the number of payments in the higher bands. The overall picture is, though, of a generous Union, particularly when compared to Atcham in the 1850s. Whereas Atcham offered no payment at all above 4s. 6d., 36% of Ludlow's payments were over 4s. 6d.

In addition to that the Ludlow Guardians made several large payments. They allowed 13s. on four occasions, and one payment of 56s. For the payment of 56s. no reason is recorded except 'see Bill'. It seems likely that this was transport costs because there is another bill of 46s. for 'expenses of conveying Elizabeth Cooper to the asylum'. One striking indication of the Ludlow Union's commitment to generous out-relief was that many payments were made to men in work or in

⁸³⁴ SA: PL 9/24/17/1, Ludlow Union Application and Report Book, Diddlebury District, 1857 – 1858, and PL 9/24/18/1, Ludlow Union Application and Report Book, Leintwardine District, 1856 - 1861.

receipt of income from clubs. One disabled man with a wife and five children received 8s. from a benefit club, and 2s. from the Union. The Union then gave him mutton, wine and beer totalling 13s. Later this was reduced to 7s. 7d plus the original 2s. It is impossible to imagine that Atcham Union would offer 12s. or that they would offer it to someone who currently already received 10s. In another case of generosity, a relief claimant earned 10s. per week, and he had a sick wife and three children. He was allowed 3 lb mutton and 1 pint of ale per day, to the value of 6s. 6d., presumably because his wife was ill. Another able-bodied labourer earning 9s. per week asked for relief. He had a disabled wife and three young children. He received mutton and ale to the value of 2s. 2d. Later he applied again and received 12 quarts of ale value 6s., 12 lbs of mutton value 6s. and 4 lbs of rice value 13s.⁸³⁵ This pattern of payment to able-bodied labourers earning a full-time wage but with either wife or children ill occurs on other occasions. These payments show that Ludlow routinely gave relief to the able-bodied employed when family members were ill. Of specifically lone children, two orphans were each allowed 7s. 6d. for clothing. There were four occasions when payment was discontinued and one in which payment was refused. Two families were offered the workhouse. The large out-relief payments were the catalyst for Dr. Bowles' critical report which eventually resulted in lower payments.

⁸³⁵ Ludlow Union offered mutton, groceries, arrowroot and wine on several occasions - PL 9/24/17/1, quarter ending Christmas 1857 (Diddlebury) and quarter ending midsummer 1858 (Culmington Parish).

Commentary on Ludlow Union Application and Report Book

1868⁸³⁶ (in lilac on above graph)

The graph shows an increase in the amount of out-relief payments when compared with 1858. The number on the lowest band (0s. – 1s. 6d.) had decreased from 22% in 1858 to 14% in 1868 resulting in an increase in the number of payments in the middle bands - (3s. 1d. – 4s. 6d. and 4s. 7d. to 6s.).

The workhouse was offered to 17 families, which is less than 10% of applicants. Ten families had their relief stopped or had it refused. Sixteen families were offered money for local schooling. Relief was almost entirely given in kind, generally in the form of mutton, bread, flour and groceries, with a recorded cash equivalent. The Union made positive responses to applications for children without parents, and offered money or goods in the range of 2s. to 4s. a week. Susan Price, a 12 year old, was allowed 20s. for clothing, probably preparatory to going into service.

The Guardians' treatment of lone women with families was generous, with payments in the middle bands, even for those with illegitimate children. The Ludlow Guardians had moved a long way from the 1834 Act. However, in 1866 Dr. Bowles had presented his report on the Ludlow Unions' out-relief policies, and even though he resigned during the furore, out-relief did decline considerably after the 1860s.⁸³⁷

The influence of Dr. Bowles appears to be felt in the level of payments. There were no very large payments made in these Application and Report Books in

⁸³⁶ SA: PL 9/24/19/15. Ludlow Union Application and Report Book, quarter ending 1868, quarter ending Lady Day 1868 (Ashford Carbonel Parish), quarter ending Lady Day 1868 (Cainham).

⁸³⁷ D. Williams, 'The Ludlow Guardians 1836 – 1900', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, Vol. 77.

contrast to the 1858 table. Also the number of payments from 6s. 1d upwards has been reduced.

Summary

Despite the Poor Law Authority's emphasis on workhouses and the able-bodied, Shropshire Unions, with the partial exception of Atcham, viewed out-relief as their prime method of relieving the poor. The claimants seeking relief were mostly families and were largely requesting medical assistance or general relief. Ludlow established an efficient system for identifying paupers' needs and generally granted relief in full. Atcham and Ellesmere chose not to employ a sufficient number of Relieving Officers to do the same as Ludlow. Atcham did not because it was determined to reduce out-relief to a minimum. Despite this aim Atcham did increase relief payments during bad winters. Ellesmere used parish officials to operate as surrogate Relieving Officers. Wellington Union devised make-work schemes, with payment channelled towards families with children, as an alternative to out-relief and the workhouse.

Analysing payments of out-relief the three Unions examined show different actions and attitudes. Madeley Union maintained a dilapidated workhouse until 1874, repeatedly forestalling requests and orders to build a new one. This gave the opportunity for the Union's funds to be generous (compared to other Unions) in the amounts of out-relief allowed. Atcham kept out-relief payments low, and suspended them for non-resident paupers. The Atcham Union offered to relieve claimants' families by taking one or more of the families' children into the workhouse. They also offered to take children into the workhouse to benefit from the education provided.

Ludlow's relief payments were initially very low but surprisingly increased after the building of its new workhouse. Its payments were consistently more generous than Atcham until influential Guardians became concerned about costs in the 1860s.

While some Boards of Guardians were more committed than others to the use of the workhouse, and were more or less generous in the giving of out-relief, the central fact is that with very few exceptions, out-relief payments were very low when compared to agricultural workers' wages. They were even lower when compared to industrial workers' wages in the north-east Shropshire coalfield. With agricultural workers' wages insufficient for adequate family nutrition, out-relief which was significantly less than those wages was therefore not sufficient for families to live on without other survival strategies.

Nor would out-relief for children or families with children match the material benefits from living in a Shropshire Union Workhouse.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This thesis began by stating that it would engage with the experiences of poor children in Shropshire. It has done that, and has systematically compiled evidence, firstly of the low standard of living of agricultural labourers and their families, and then the manner in which Shropshire workhouse administrations treated children. It examined the quality of education provided by workhouse schools and the medical services provided both in the workhouse and in families' homes. It showed the manner in which children were guided during the transition from workhouse to workplace. Lastly, it offered a detailed analysis of the levels of out-relief received by families and lone children. This thesis was written to investigate the plight of poor children in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and has convincingly added to the history of the New Poor Law and of children.

Poor children in Shropshire lived in a variety of environments. Some lived in the workhouse, either briefly or until they achieved adulthood. Some lived in poor families who needed and claimed assistance from the Poor Law system, and received that in the form of relief while still living at home. Some lived as part of a family which led an independent life in the sense of not claiming relief from the Poor Law system instituted in 1834. These three groups of children had different childhood experiences, and the central purpose of this thesis has been to identify the characteristics of these three different experiences in the particular context of Shropshire.

Shropshire had a predominantly agricultural economy with low wages in the south of the county and less low wages in the north. The children of poor, independent agricultural workers were outside of the Poor Law Union relief structure. The evidence shows that labourers' families both locally and nationally received a diet that was unable to create the energy to meet the needs of manual workers, pregnant and nursing mothers, and children engaged in physical growth and manual labour. In general their diet consisted largely of bread and potatoes and was unable to maintain family health.⁸³⁸ To maintain an adequate standard of living there needed to be more than one breadwinner in the family, but women's work in Shropshire was sporadic and irregular, which placed pressure on the need for young children's work. Allotments and potato grounds were a way of supplementing labourers' income but provision of allotment and potato grounds was poor in Shropshire, and allotments were only provided by a very few large landowners. Government Reports from the mid-nineteenth century show that compared to national standards the cottages of Shropshire agricultural labourers were of overall very poor quality.

In Shropshire workhouses over 50% of inmates were children in 1841, and consistently averaged around 45% - 50% in the next two censuses.⁸³⁹ The Poor Law Amendment Act and its drafters envisaged workhouses designed to punish the able-bodied, but Shropshire Guardians were faced with the difficulties of caring

⁸³⁸ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660 – 1900* (Cambridge, 1985); S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History* (2005) 16, 1, 21 – 52; S. Horrell and D. Oxley, 'Bringing home the bacon? Regional nutrition, stature, and gender in the industrial revolution', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 4 (2012), pp. 1354 – 1379; J. Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge, 1989); A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', included in D. Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1976); B. Reay, *Rural England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); B. Reay, *The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2010); P. Sharpe, 'Explaining the Short Stature of the Poor', *Economic History Review*, Vol 65, Issue 4, pp. 1475 – 1494; S. Horrell, 'Home Demand and British Industrialisation', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (September 1996), pp 569 – 570; Parliamentary Papers, *Public Health, Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council*, with appendix, 1863, p. 246.

⁸³⁹ *Censuses for 1841, 1851 and 1861*.

for large numbers of children. Realising that children needed a more specialised regime than a general mixed workhouse could easily provide, six of the 13 Unions arranged for separate provision for their children.

This would have enabled institutions such as the schools at Quatt, Waters Upton/Ercall Magna and Gnosall to treat children appropriately to their age and needs, away from the workhouses' older clientele. Workhouse diets for adults and children were more nutritious than the diets of independent labourers' families and families on out-relief.⁸⁴⁰ Shropshire workhouse inmates received three meals a day, with meat served 3 or 4 times a week.

Until the 1850s children over 9 received adult women's portions, while the diets of children under 9 were unregulated. After 1856 there were nationally prescribed children's diets for all ages. Vegetables and fruit were not included in dietaries but would have been present in the diets at Quatt and Waters Upton/Ercall Magna, where they were grown by the children themselves as part of their industrial training. Children's workhouse diet was largely free from seasonal shortage and plenty, with guaranteed portion size, in contrast to the children of independent labourers or families on low levels of out-relief. Workhouse food was however very repetitive, poorly cooked and often served cold, but there was contemporary comment that poorer farmers could not afford a diet for themselves or their families as good as that found in the workhouse.⁸⁴¹

The education of poor children who were workhouse inmates was generally a story of progress. Initially, Guardians unused to providing an education service appointed paupers or unqualified staff who were poorly paid. The Bridgnorth Guardian with experience of organising a non-workhouse school was William

⁸⁴⁰ V. J. Johnson, *Diet in Workhouses and Prisons 1835 – 1895* (Garland, 1985).

⁸⁴¹ Parliamentary Papers, 1843, *Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture 1843, Report*, p. 242.

Wolryche Whitmore who used accommodation on his own property to institute a school for Bridgnorth Union paupers away from the workhouse. His school was also used by four other Shropshire Unions and one from Staffordshire and provided good quality education as attested by Inspectors from the Committee of Council on Education.⁸⁴²

That school (housed at Quatt, on the Dudmaston Estate) provided a mixture of academic education and industrial training to equip pauper children to live independently as adults having developed marketable skills.⁸⁴³ Wellington Union also sent children to a farm school at Ercall Magna. Large unions such as Ludlow and Atcham educated their own children in the workhouse and at certain periods employed good or very good teachers, though not continuously from 1834 to 1870. The rural unions with small numbers of children struggled to provide good education because they often appointed poor teachers. Children living in independent labourers' families would have had difficulty gaining education because of its cost, and the costs of losing children's labour while at school. For families on out-relief, survival strategies would be unlikely to include education and even after Denison's Act take up of places in Shropshire schools was small.⁸⁴⁴

Medical services for the poor were very important to both poor children and adults but nationally medical provision for the poor was underfunded if the Poor Law Unions sought to meet the needs of the poor adequately. However, within the period 1834 to 1870 Shropshire Poor Law medical provision improved and Medical Officers developed their own sense of professionalism and that same professionalism became recognised by Boards of Guardians. During that time

⁸⁴² Parliamentary Papers, 1868 – 69, Stanhope's Report, Commission on the Employment of Children, Young persons, and Women in Agriculture (1867); Parliamentary Papers, [4202] [4202-I]. Second report of the commissioners, with appendix part I.

⁸⁴³ Parliamentary Paper, 1854 – 1855, Jelinger Symons, General Report, Committee of Council on Education, (1854 – XLL767), pp. 160 – 161.

⁸⁴⁴ See Chapter 4. Denison's Act – An Act to provide for the education of children in receipt of outdoor relief (1855).

Medical Officers persuaded Guardians to attempt to solve the problem of the 'itch', and persuaded them also to allow sick children to leave the unhealthy workhouse to live with outdoor relief in their home village. Living at home with out-relief may have been perceived by Workhouse and District Medical Officers as more healthy for children at times when the workhouse population was prey to the spread of disease. Because drugs had to be paid for personally by Medical Officers and were not always efficacious, Medical Officers prescribed foodstuffs in order to improve the diet of patients on outdoor relief.⁸⁴⁵ Such limited records of Medical Officers' visits to paupers on out-relief as do exist show a strong commitment to their patients, evidenced by repeat visits on several consecutive days.⁸⁴⁶ Ludlow Guardians were also in the forefront in questioning the value of an apothecary's qualification when appointing Medical Officers.⁸⁴⁷ Guardians in the larger Unions also began to respect and follow Workhouse Medical Officers' advice about the linkage between diet and inmates' health. However, the evidence shows that individual commitment by Union Medical Officers and some Guardians was contextualised by an underfunded service.⁸⁴⁸

Initially after 1834, parishes retained responsibility for pauper apprenticeships but Unions took responsibility in 1844. Apprenticeships were organised for children resident in the workhouse. Generally the Unions diligently followed the Poor Law Commission rules when dealing with apprenticeships and showed a sense of responsibility to workhouse children who became employees rather than apprentices. At the same time they showed much less concern for children apprenticed to mines outside of Shropshire.

⁸⁴⁵ SA: PL 9/28/6/1; PL 9/28/6/2; PL 9/28/6/3.

⁸⁴⁶ SA: PL 9/28/1/1, 1841 – 1842.

⁸⁴⁶ SA: PL 9/28/1/2, 1842.

⁸⁴⁶ SA: PL 928/1/3, 1847; PL 9/28/1/4, 1853.

⁸⁴⁷ SA: PL 9/2/1/1, p. 378.

⁸⁴⁸ K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

The charter-masters who recruited workers for Shropshire mines did not employ apprentice labour, believing it to be unreasonable for apprentices only receiving board and lodging to work alongside and performing the same tasks as well-paid employees. Despite knowledge of that attitude Shropshire Unions apprenticed boys to mines in Staffordshire and elsewhere. Shropshire mines did employ children and while being reasonably well paid, (when compared to agricultural labourers) they performed physically demanding tasks in a dangerous environment, which often led to later ill-health.⁸⁴⁹

The drafters of the Poor Law Amendment Act intended workhouses to be the main vehicle for providing poor relief. With the partial exception of Atcham, however, the Shropshire Unions continued to use out-relief as their main method of relieving the poor. Many of the county's workhouses were never full during the period of this thesis. Of those that were, such as Madeley in 1842, they were only full for a short time largely because of the industrial recession. Madeley workhouse was also full because the Guardians had not chosen to expand it, or build anew, when the Madeley Poor Law Union was created, with consequently increased demand for its services. Not spending large sums of money on a new workhouse enabled Madeley to offer more generous out-relief than other unions. Comparing the payments of Madeley, Ludlow and Atcham, Madeley Poor Law Union made the most generous provision for individuals and families, and the constituent parishes of Madeley Union may have seen that as an advantageous *quid pro quo* to not being required to build a new workhouse.

The significance of Shropshire workhouses being run below capacity is twofold. Firstly, unions could have adopted a relief system largely based on the use of the workhouse, but continued extensive use of out-relief even when the workhouses

⁸⁴⁹ Parliamentary Papers, 1842, J. Mitchell, *Children's Employment Commission Report*, p. 38.

were used way below capacity. Secondly, a workhouse partially empty provided extra room for inmates and avoided overcrowding, particularly regarding sharing of beds.

In the early years after the Poor Law Amendment Act Wellington Union looked for an alternative to offering the workhouse or out-relief and devised make-work schemes, designed to help labourers with large families and in consequence paid more money to families than would have been likely with purely out-relief.

Atcham made successful attempts to reduce out-relief by refusing to finance Atcham paupers living in other Unions, and by employing only two Relieving Officers for a Union of 40 parishes. The Atcham Guardians also adopted a policy of taking into the workhouse one or more children from a family as an attempt to relieve the financial burden on the parents.⁸⁵⁰ This made it possible to deny the family out-relief. Nationally and locally Poor Law Unions sought to keep costs to a minimum to ease the pressure on rate-payers. This desire to maintain a low poor-rate added confusion to the debate around the relative value of relieving paupers at home or in the workhouse, because maintaining a family in the workhouse was much more expensive for Unions than providing out-relief for a family. The chapter on Out-Relief shows clearly that Atcham as a Union committed to using the workhouse made much lower out-relief payments to families with children than did Ludlow or Madeley. An examination of the tables towards the end of the out-relief chapter shows the comparative size of out-relief payments of the three Unions. However, above all they show that with one or two exceptions the level of relief offered was much less than the wages of agricultural labourers. These same labourers' wages were shown in Chapter 2 to be too low to maintain an adequate diet for a family. That chapter also showed that in rural Shropshire

⁸⁵⁰ SA: PL 1/16/3/2, Atcham Poor Law Union, Application and Report Book, Atcham District, 1865 – 1869, Wigley family; PL 1/16/3/4, Atcham Poor Law Union, Application and Report Book, Atcham District, 1869, Yeomans family and Evans family.

there was little work for either women or children and the provision of allotments and good quality cottages was poor. If agricultural labourers' families' standard of living was very low then the standard of living of families on out-relief would have been even lower, because out-relief provided was much less than agricultural wage levels. However, children in poor labourers' families and children in families on out-relief did have the benefit of a family life, however financially poor that family was.

There was also a disadvantage to workhouse life for children. The main disadvantage was the lack of freedom, because while adults could leave at 3 hours' notice, children could not. Children's experience of and acquiescence to workhouse life would have depended much on the individual. For those who had had a harsh life outside, with never enough to eat, an ordered rule-based institution with fair shares of food, and camaraderie with others would have had benefits. Equally, peer group or adult bullying and abuse may have been the norm. For others, those same rules and the enforcement of them would have heightened the need for independence. If child-only institutions such as at Quatt, Ercall Magna and Gnosall offered a less rule-bound environment where children's individual needs were recognised, then perhaps the balance between institutional care and independence was more evenly poised.

The experience of workhouse life for children showed more eligible characteristics when compared to non-institutional poor children. Workhouse children lived in weather-tight accommodation, which was overcrowded at times. They were fed uninteresting but generally adequate food, particularly at the farm schools.

Workhouse diet was more nutritious than the diet of children on out-relief and of children in the families of agricultural labourers. Their health care was underfunded but available, as it was with children in families on out-relief. Pauper

apprenticeships were administered in an acceptable way with the exception of those children placed in mining. Aftercare for apprentices and ex-workhouse children who were employed was good, and showed that Unions were concerned that children started their working lives well. Availability of education and training also sets children's workhouse experience as more eligible than impoverished life outside. The quality of that education was variable across the county, but very good in places, thus assisting poor children to lead productive adult lives.

Beyond the immediate experience of the workhouse child, the provision of an education would have contributed to a good life experience at a time of economic and social change.

This thesis shows that once one removes the imponderables of independence, a well-run workhouse, for all its limitations as an institution, would have provided a materially more beneficial environment for children, than being a member of an agricultural labourer's family or a family on out-relief.

Appendix 1a

1841 Shropshire Workhouse Population

Age Groups

<u>Poor Law Unions</u>	0 - 15	16 - 31	32 - 47	48 - 63	64 - 79	80 →	Total
Atcham	65	10	9	6	20	5	115
Bridgnorth	11	12	7	8	14	5	57
Church Stretton	35	7	3	2	4	3	54
Cleobury Mortimer	23	7	4	0	10	1	45
Clun	52	11	4	5	3	0	75
Drayton	49	5	8	5	13	4	84
Ellesmere	83	9	13	20	13	4	142
Madeley	22	12	9	3	10	2	58
Ludlow	90	16	9	9	14	4	142
Newport	38	5	8	4	12	3	70
Quatt *	82	0	0	0	0	0	82
Shifnal	17	7	5	3	10	1	43
Wellington and Ercall Magna *	43	3	10	13	16	2	87
Wem	34	13	4	5	13	3	72
Total	644	117	93	83	152	37	1126

Appendix 1b

1851 Shropshire Workhouse Population

Age Group

<u>Poor Law Unions</u>	0 - 15	16 - 31	32 - 47	48 - 63	64 - 79	80 →	Total
Atcham	111	31	23	17	44	9	235
Bridgnorth	16	14	10	13	13	1	67
Church Stretton	40	13	5	3	4	0	65
Cleobury Mortimer	35	16	10	7	6	2	76
Clun	33	22	5	6	1	1	68
Drayton	32	9	13	9	20	3	86
Ellesmere	80	36	15	19	22	3	175
Madeley	19	12	4	4	13	2	54
Ludlow	56	18	13	9	3	1	100
Newport	42	12	6	4	10	6	80
Quatt *	39	0	0	0	1	0	40
Shifnal	22	13	3	2	9	3	52
Wellington and Ercall Magna *	60	17	13	7	25	5	127
Wem	16	21	4	9	12	2	64
Total	601	234	124	109	183	38	1289

Appendix 1c

1861 Shropshire Workhouse Population
Age Group

<u>Poor Law Unions</u>	0 - 15	16 - 31	32 - 47	48 - 63	64 - 79	80 →	Total
Atcham	63	20	19	22	33	14	171
Bridgnorth	3	16	5	10	17	4	55
Church Stretton	23	8	6	4	4	1	46
Cleobury Mortimer	9	9	3	5	7	0	33
Clun	36	17	10	11	9	3	86
Drayton	26	9	7	11	8	5	66
Ellesmere	46	17	8	12	19	6	108
Madeley	5	16	5	3	3	7	39
Ludlow	37	21	13	5	17	3	96
Newport	22	21	11	8	15	5	82
Quatt *	106	0	0	0	0	0	106
Shifnal	19	10	6	9	2	1	47
Wellington and Ercall Magna *	54	14	13	17	17	6	121
Wem	22	13	12	7	13	2	69
Whitchurch	16	12	13	5	13	0	59
Total	487	203	131	129	177	57	1184

* Quatt was not a Shropshire Union but a school initially established by Bridgnorth Union but generally accommodating children from other Unions. Ercall Magna was the Wellington children's workhouse and school located apart from the main workhouse. The Wellington and Ercall Magna census numbers are placed together.

Appendix 2

Rooms in Ellesmere Workhouse, 1856⁸⁵¹

Room	Length (ft.)	Width (ft.)
Old Men	32	20
Work Room	20	16
Boys' School	41	16
Old Women	20	16
Girls' School	19	16
Children under seven	20	20
Able-bodied women	20	20
Women's Sick Ward	82	20
Lying-in Ward	30	20
Girls' Bedroom	40	20
Children's Bedroom	53	20
Able-bodied Women's Bedroom	86	20
Old Women's Bedroom	30	20
Married Women's Bedroom	16	11
Men's Sick Ward	30	20
Old Men's Ward	30	20
Boys' Ward	40	20
Itch Ward	21	12

⁸⁵¹ TNA: MH 12/9938, Correspondence between Poor Law Board and Ellesmere Union, Doyle to Poor Law Board, 19 January 1856.

Appendix 3

1835 Dietaries

Dietaries Nos. 1 and 2

No. 1.—DIETARY for ABLE-BODIED MEN and WOMEN.										
BREAKFAST.			DINNER.				SUPPER.			
	Bread.	Gruel.	Cooked Meat.	Potatoes.	Soup.	Suet, or Rice Pudding.	Bread.	Cheese.	Broth.	
	oz.	pints.	oz.	lbs.	pints.	oz.	oz.	oz.	pints.	
Sunday . . Men .	6	1½	5	½	..	..	6	..	1½	
Women	5	1½	5	½	..	..	5	..	1½	
Monday . . Men .	6	1½	..	..	1½	..	6	2	—	
Women	5	1½	..	..	1½	..	5	2	—	
Tuesday . . Men .	6	1½	5	½	..	..	6	2	1½	
Women	5	1½	5	½	..	..	5	2	1½	
Wednesday . Men .	6	1½	..	..	1½	..	6	2	—	
Women	5	1½	..	..	1½	..	5	2	—	
Thursday . . Men .	6	1½	5	½	..	..	6	2	1½	
Women	5	1½	5	½	..	..	5	2	1½	
Friday . . Men .	6	1½	..	..	..	14	6	..	1½	
Women	5	1½	..	..	..	12	5	..	1½	
Saturday . . Men .	6	1½	..	..	1½	..	6	2	—	
Women	5	1½	..	..	1½	..	5	2	—	

Old people of sixty years of age and upwards may be allowed one ounce of tea, five ounces of butter, and seven ounces of sugar per week, in lieu of gruel for breakfast, if deemed expedient to make this change.

Children under nine years of age to be dieted at discretion; above nine, to be allowed the same quantities as women.

Sick to be dieted as directed by the medical officer.

The 'Model Dietaries' published by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1835.

BREAKFAST.			DINNER.				SUPPER.		
	Bread.	Cheese.	Butter.	Meat Pudding, with Vegetables*.	Suet Pudding with Vegetables*.		Bread.	Cheese.	Butter.
	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.
Sunday . . Men .	6	1	..	16	..	..	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	10	..	..	5	..	½
Monday . . Men .	6	1	..	..	..	7	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	..	7	5	..	½
Tuesday . . Men .	6	1	..	..	16	..	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	10	..	5	..	½
Wednesday . Men .	6	1	..	..	..	7	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	..	7	5	..	½
Thursday . . Men .	6	1	..	..	..	7	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	..	7	5	..	½
Friday . . Men .	6	1	..	..	16	..	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	10	..	5	..	½
Saturday . . Men .	6	1	..	..	..	7	6	1	..
Women	5	..	½	..	..	7	5	..	½

Old people, being all sixty years of age and upwards: the weekly addition of one ounce of tea, and milk or sugar; also an additional meat pudding dinner on Thursday in each week, in lieu of bread and cheese, to those for whose age and infirmities it may be deemed requisite.

Children under nine years of age: bread and milk for their breakfast and supper, or gruel when milk cannot be obtained; also such proportions of the dinner diet as may be requisite for their respective ages.

Sick: whatever is ordered for them by the medical officer.

* The vegetables are extra, and not included in the weight specified.

No. 2 dietary.

Dietary No. 3

			BREAKFAST.		D I N N E R.					SUPPER.	
			Bread.	Gruel.	Cooked Meat.	Potatoes or other Vegetables.	Soup.	Bread.	Cheese.	Bread.	Cheese.
			oz.	pints.	oz.	lb.	pints.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.
Sunday	Men		8	1½	.	.	.	7	2	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	.	.	.	6	1½	5	1½
Monday	Men		8	1½	.	.	.	7	2	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	.	.	.	6	1½	5	1½
Tuesday	Men		8	1½	8	$\frac{3}{4}$	.	.	.	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	6	$\frac{3}{4}$	.	.	.	5	1½
Wednesday	Men		8	1½	.	.	.	7	2	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	.	.	.	6	1½	5	1½
Thursday	Men		8	1½	.	.	1½	6	.	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	.	.	1½	5	.	5	1½
Friday	Men		8	1½	.	.	.	7	2	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	.	.	.	6	1½	5	1½
Saturday	Men		8	1½	Bacon.	$\frac{3}{4}$	.	.	.	6	1½
	Women		6	1½	4	$\frac{3}{4}$	.	.	.	5	1½

Old people, of sixty years of age and upwards, may be allowed one ounce of tea, five ounces of butter, and seven ounces of sugar per week, in lieu of gruel for breakfast, if deemed expedient to make this change.

Children under nine years of age, to be dieted at discretion; above nine, to be allowed the same quantities as women.

Sick to be dieted as directed by the medical officer.

No. 3 dietary.

Dietary No. 4

No. 3 dietary.

		BREAKFAST.		DINNER.					SUPPER.	
		Bread.	Gruel.	Pickled Pork, or Bacon, with Vegetables.	Soup.	Bread.	Meat Pudding, with Vegetables.	Rice or Suet Pudding with Vegetables.	Bread.	Cheese.
		oz.	pints.	oz.	pints.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.
Sunday	Men	8	1 ½	..	2	6	..	..	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	1 ½	5	..	..	5	1 ½
Monday	Men	8	1 ½	..	..	..	..	10	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	..	..	..	..	5	1 ½
Tuesday	Men	8	1 ½	..	2	6	..	..	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	1 ½	5	..	..	5	1 ½
Wednesday	Men	8	1 ½	6	..	..	..	..	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	5	..	..	..	12	5	1 ½
Thursday	Men	8	1 ½	..	..	..	..	10	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	..	..	..	..	5	1 ½
Friday	Men	8	1 ½	..	2	6	..	..	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	1 ½	5	..	..	5	1 ½
Saturday	Men	8	1 ½	..	..	..	12	..	6	2
	Women	6	1 ½	..	..	..	10	..	5	1 ½

The vegetables are not included in the weight specified, which is for the meat when cooked.

If it be thought desirable, half an ounce of butter may be given to the women in lieu of cheese, for supper.

Old people of sixty years of age and upwards may be allowed one ounce of tea, five ounces of butter, and seven ounces of sugar per week, in lieu of gruel for breakfast, if deemed expedient to make this change.

Children under nine years of age to be dieted at discretion; above nine, to be allowed the same quantities as women.

Sick to be dieted as directed by the medical officer.

No. 4 dietary.

Dietary No. 5

		BREAK-FAST.		DINNER.						SUPPER.		
		Bread.	Gruel or Porridge	Cooked Meat.	Veget- ables.	Soup.	Boiled Rice or Suet Pudding	Bread	Cheese.	Bread.	Potatoes.	Cheese.
		oz.	pints.	oz.	lb.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	lb.	oz.
Sunday	Men	7	1½	5	¾	.	.	.	oz.	7	lb.	1½
	Women	6	1½	5	¾	.	.	.	.	6	.	1½
Monday	Men	7	1½	.	.	1½	.	7	.	.	¾	.
	Women	6	1½	.	.	1½	.	6	.	.	¾	.
Tuesday	Men	7	1½	.	.	.	14	.	.	7	.	1½
	Women	6	1½	.	.	.	12	.	.	6	.	1½
Wednesday	Men	7	1½	.	.	.	.	7	2	.	¾	.
	Women	6	1½	.	.	.	.	6	2	.	¾	.
Thursday	Men	7	1½	5	¾	.	.	.	.	7	.	1½
	Women	6	1½	5	¾	.	.	.	.	6	.	1½
Friday	Men	7	1½	.	.	1½	.	7	.	.	¾	.
	Women	6	1½	.	.	1½	.	6	.	.	¾	.
Saturday	Men	7	1½	.	.	.	.	7	2	.	¾	.
	Women	6	1½	.	.	.	.	6	2	.	¾	.

Old people, of sixty years of age and upwards, may be allowed one ounce of tea, five ounces of butter, and seven ounces of sugar per week, in lieu of gruel for breakfast, if deemed expedient to make this change.

Children under nine years of age, to be dieted at discretion; above nine, to be allowed the same quantities as women.

Sick to be dieted as directed by the medical officer.

No. 5 dietary.

Dietary No. 6

No. 6.—DIETARY for ABLE-BODIED PAUPERS.														
		BREAKFAST.			DINNER.						SUPPER.			
		Bread.	Cheese.	Butter.	Boiled Meat.	Potatoes.	Yeast Dumplings.	Suet Pudding.	Bread.	Cheese.	Bread.	Cheese.	Butter.	Broth.
		oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	oz.	pints.
Sunday	Men	6	1	•	•	•	•	16	•	•	6	1	•	•
	Women	5	•	•	•	•	•	12	•	•	5	•	•	•
Monday	Men	6	1	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•
	Women	5	•	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•
Tuesday	Men	6	1	•	4	12	5½	•	•	•	6	•	•	1
	Women	5	•	•	4	12	5½	•	•	•	5	•	•	1
Wednesday	Men	6	1	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•
	Women	5	•	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•
Thursday	Men	6	1	•	4	12	5½	•	•	•	6	•	•	1
	Women	5	•	•	4	12	5½	•	•	•	5	•	•	1
Friday	Men	6	1	•	•	•	11	•	•	•	6	1	•	•
	Women	5	•	•	•	•	11	•	•	•	5	•	•	•
Saturday	Men	6	1	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•
	Women	5	•	•	•	•	•	•	6	1	•	•	•	•

Old people, being all sixty years of age and upwards; the weekly addition of one ounce of tea, and milk or sugar to those for whose age and infirmities it may be deemed requisite.

Children under nine years of age; bread and milk for their breakfast and supper, or gruel when milk cannot be obtained; also such proportions of the dinner diet as may be requisite for their respective ages.

Sick, whatever is ordered for them by the medical officer.

No. 6 dietary.

55

Appendix 4a

Dietary for Children from 2 to 5

CHILDREN'S DIETS

From April 1856, unions were required to produce official dietaries for children aged from two to five, and from five to nine. In order to assist them in this task, the Poor Law Board published a sample dietary for each age group:

DIETARY FOR CHILDREN FROM 2 TO 5									
	<i>Breakfast</i>		<i>Dinner</i>				<i>Supper</i>		
	Bread	Milk	Meat	Potatoes	Suet Pudding	Rice Pudding	Bread	Butter	Milk and Water
	oz	pints	oz	oz	oz	oz	oz	oz	pints
Sunday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	3	8	-	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Monday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	8	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Tuesday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	3	8	-	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Wednesday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	-	8	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Thursday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	3	8	-	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Friday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	8	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Saturday	4	$\frac{1}{2}$	3	8	-	-	4	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$

Appendix 4b

Dietary for Children from 5 to 9

DIETARY FOR CHILDREN FROM 5 TO 9									
	<i>Breakfast</i>		<i>Dinner</i>				<i>Supper</i>		
	Bread	Milk	Meat	Potatoes	Suet Pudding	Rice Pudding	Bread	Butter	Milk and Water
	oz	Pints	oz	oz	oz	oz	oz	oz	pints
Sunday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$	8	-	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Monday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	10	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Tuesday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$	8	-	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Wednesday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	-	10	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Thursday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$	8	-	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Friday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	10	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Saturday	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$	8	-	-	5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$

Appendix 5

Duties of Chesterfield Workhouse teachers from Monday to Saturday

<u>Summer</u>	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Duties</u>
5.45 a.m.	6.45 a.m.	See the children rise, wash and dress, a few minutes allowed for private prayer and see the windows opened and bedclothes thrown back.
6 a.m.	7 a.m.	Inspect the children for clean faces and hands, hair combed and shoes cleaned. Take them out for exercise.
7.45 a.m.	7.45 a.m.	Prayers and breakfast. See the schoolroom swept and fire lighted by the children. See beds are made and room swept.
8.45 a.m.	8.45 a.m.	Roll call in schoolroom then lessons. 15 minutes recreation for children between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.
12 noon	12 noon	Dinner. Teachers to be in attendance.
12.30 p.m.	12.30 p.m.	Recreation. Some degree of supervision required from teacher.
1.45 p.m.	1.45 p.m.	School. 15 minutes recreation at 3 p.m.
4.30 p.m.	4.30 p.m.	Recreation. Some degree of supervision required from teacher.
6 p.m.	6 p.m.	Supper and prayers. Teachers to be in attendance and to read the prayers.
8.30 p.m.	7 p.m.	See children retire in an orderly manner to bed and say their private prayers.

Appendix 6

Grades of Teacher

There were four grades of teacher, and within each grade there were three subsections, effectively making a twelve point scale. The four grades were Permission (the lowest), Probation, Competency and Efficiency (the highest).

The skills and knowledge required for a Permission certificate were to:

- read fluently
- write correctly a few simple sentences
- read aloud from the New Testament
- write from dictation sums in the first four rules of arithmetic and to compute them accurately
- answer simple questions about the life of Christ.

The skills and knowledge required for a Probation certificate were to:

- read fluently
- write correctly a few simple sentences, read aloud from the Testament
- write from dictation sums in the first four simple and compound rules of arithmetic, and to work them correctly.
- answer correctly, in writing, a few simple questions on the life of Christ and his disciples
- examine a class in a reading lesson as to meaning of words and sentences and comprehension of the passage.

The skills and knowledge required for a Competency certificate were to:

- be able to describe in writing the organisation of the school, including methods of instruction and discipline and the course of instruction;
- be able to write from dictation, and work any sum with correctness in the arithmetic of whole numbers, including simple interest;
- be able to parse and understand the construction of English prose;
- be able to give written answers to questions related to the geography of Britain and the Colonies;
- be able to give correct replies to questions on Scripture and the Geography of Palestine;
- be able to conduct a class in the presence of the Inspector;

The skills and knowledge required for an Efficiency certificate were to:

be able to show sound attainments in biblical knowledge, English grammar, composition, etymology, decimal arithmetic, geography of the British Empire and Palestine, the outlines of English history, and the theory and art of organising and managing a school.

In determining the quality of the certificate the Inspector was required to take account of any skill in handicraft or industrial occupation and zeal of teaching.⁸⁵²

Salaries of teachers would be paid from central funds, determined by the certificate of attainment of a teacher.

⁸⁵² Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, Parliamentary Papers 1847, p. x, xi.

Appendix 7

Education Inspections of Shropshire Workhouse Schools

Wem

1848	Adam Boulton, Schoolmaster, Permission Third Class Organisation: none, boys and girls together Discipline: improving Method: none Instruction: scarcely any Schoolmaster: a pauper schoolmaster ⁸⁵³
1850	Organisation: much improved Discipline: much improved Instruction: much improved Schoolmaster: Permission Third Class Industrial Training: boys and girls – none
1852	There are usually only very small children here, who are very nicely instructed in elementary knowledge. A new teacher, but at present not any very decided fruit. ⁸⁵⁴
1854	John Jeffreys, schoolmaster, Probation
1857	In this small workhouse, containing about 70 inmates, the master has been appointed schoolmaster, and though I am aware that this junction of offices is not thought expedient, in this case, owing to the teaching capacity and zeal of the master, the instruction was good and much improved. Industrial training fair. ⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵³ Parliamentary Papers 1847 – 8 – 9, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁵⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1 – 2, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁵⁵ Parliamentary Papers 1857 – 8, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Newport

1848	Very few children, who are instructed on the Dame School system at Gnosall ⁸⁵⁶
1850	Organisation: fair Discipline: good Instruction: fair Mistress only – Probation, Second Class Industrial Training: boys none, girls fair ⁸⁵⁷
1852	This is a pleasing little school, creditably conducted by a schoolmistress. ⁸⁵⁸
1854	Two teachers – both Probation ⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1847 – 8 – 9, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁵⁷ Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1 – 2, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁵⁸ Parliamentary Papers 1852, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁵⁹ Parliamentary Papers 1854, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Church Stretton

1848	<p> Organisation: very bad Discipline: apparently harsh, the children seem cowed Method: Dame School Instruction: purely mechanical, the children understood scarcely anything they read Schoolmistress: schoolmistress only, no capacity for teaching Special: no sufficient industrial training, but the board profess to be willing to give it in spade husbandry, refuse to join District School </p> <p>⁸⁶⁰</p>
1850	<p> Organisation: rather improved Discipline: fair Instruction: moderate Schoolmistress: mistress only, Permission second class Industrial Training: boys inferior, girls fair⁸⁶¹ </p>
1851	<p>Report by Andrew Doyle, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner - a very fair degree of attention appears to me to be habitually bestowed upon their industrial training.</p>
1852	<p> Pleasing evidence of a more earnest attention on the part of the schoolmistress A mixed school. The instruction given here is improved in the school. There is not much industrial training for the boys, but those who work well. The number is too small to admit of much being done.⁸⁶² </p>
1855	<p>Schoolmistress Sarah Atkins, Probation</p>
1857	<p>This little mixed school is very insufficiently instructed. There has been a falling off, and no adequate pains are taken to make what little is taught practically useful.⁸⁶³</p>

⁸⁶⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1849, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁶¹ Parliamentary Papers 1840, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁶² Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1 – 2, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*, 1850 – 1 - 2

⁸⁶³ Parliamentary Papers 1857 – 8, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Wellington

1848	<p>Schoolmaster John Davies, Probation Second Class</p> <p>good schoolroom</p> <p>Organisation: on the same principle as Quatt, as respects the isolation of the children.</p> <p>Discipline good</p> <p>Method: satisfactory upon the whole</p> <p>Instruction: defective</p> <p>Schoolmaster: master only. It appears to me that he has not improved the children to the extent of his capacity.⁸⁶⁴</p>
1850	<p>Organisation: rather improved</p> <p>Discipline: fair</p> <p>Instruction: slight improvement</p> <p>Schoolmaster master only, Probation Second Class</p> <p>Industrial Training: boys fair⁸⁶⁵</p>
1851	<p>Report by Andrew Doyle, Inspector for the Poor Law Board – The School of this Union is in all respects admirably managed. The education mental and industrial of the children is unquestionably much better than can be attained by the children of the labouring people of the most prosperous districts in the country⁸⁶⁶</p>
1852	<p>Schoolteacher John Davies, Competency Class One</p> <p>This is another farm and mixed school. The prevailing defect in the school is a want of vivacity. The Schoolmaster . . . has also much improved the tone and discipline of the children. (Later report, same year.) This mixed school is decidedly deteriorated. The want of vivacity named in my last Report is now a sombre dullness almost amounting to torpor. Mental intelligence departs with mental activity. If more life is not infused into this school the effect on the children will be prejudicial.⁸⁶⁷</p>
1854	<p>Schoolmaster John Davies – no certificate. School described as second class (out of four classes).</p>
1857	<p>The school is at Waters Upton, and is a farm school detached wholly from the Union. The governor is schoolmaster and bailiff, and I believe that he follows the wishes of the guardians by giving very little instruction. The industrial work, for which my Lords allow an annual payment, is well done.⁸⁶⁸</p>

⁸⁶⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1847 – 8 – 9, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁶⁵ Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1 – 2, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁶⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1851, Pauper Children, Reports made to the Poor Law Board by their inspectors, Mr. Doyle, Mr. Farnall, and Sir John Walsham, on the education and training of pauper children in their respective districts, in the year 1850.

⁸⁶⁷ Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1 – 2, *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁶⁸ Parliamentary Papers 1857 (2386), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Cleobury Mortimer

1848	<p>Organisation: very fair</p> <p>Discipline: tolerable</p> <p>Method: Dame School</p> <p>Instruction: very fair upon the whole</p> <p>Schoolmistress: schoolmistress only⁸⁶⁹</p>
1850	<p>Organisation: fair</p> <p>Discipline: fair</p> <p>Instruction: very fair</p> <p>Schoolmistress: schoolmistress too ill to be examined</p> <p>Industrial Training: boys occasionally work in garden, girls fair⁸⁷⁰</p>
1851	Report from Andrew Doyle, Poor Law Board Inspector. Doyle reports good progress in industrial training, while awaiting sending their pupils to Quatt. ⁸⁷¹
1852	I found some improvement in mental intelligence, as well as in the routine branches - - - some notable deficiencies in the younger ones. ⁸⁷²
1854	Schoolmistress Sarah Jane, Probation ⁸⁷³

⁸⁶⁹ Parliamentary Papers 1849 (1111), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1850 (1256), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷¹ Parliamentary Papers 1851 (646), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷² Parliamentary Papers 1852 (1532), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷³ Parliamentary Papers 1854 (1841), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Bridgnorth (Quatt) – South East Shropshire District School

1848	<p>Henry Garland, Efficiency First Class</p> <p>Organisation: very good</p> <p>Discipline: excellent</p> <p>Method: very satisfactory</p> <p>Instruction: very good in every respect</p> <p>Schoolmaster and schoolmistress: master Efficiency First Class, mistress Probation</p> <p>Of spade husbandry the Bridgnorth Union offers by far the best example in my district.⁸⁷⁴</p>
1850	<p>Henry Garland, described as distinguished teacher</p> <p>Organisation: fair</p> <p>Discipline: good</p> <p>Instruction: very good in all respects</p> <p>Industrial Training: boys and girls excellent⁸⁷⁵</p>
1851	<p>Report by Andrew Doyle,</p> <p>As a Union school . . . this establishment is entitled to the highest praise.⁸⁷⁶</p>
1852	<p>Schoolmasters: Henry Garland, Efficiency Class One, Henry Bower, Probation, Class Two</p> <p>Schoolmistress: Miss Garland, unexamined</p> <p>This excellent establishment maintains its character, making due allowance for the drawback experienced through the difficulty of obtaining fit assistant teachers, which, however, I think will soon be overcome. Both schools are now mixed. The farm produce is less than usual, owing to the quantity of land recently broken up. I find very few of the children from the other three Unions, which is partly owing to the fact that they do not send all their children from the workhouse to the district school, but retain them there. This is a great abuse, which should be remedied.⁸⁷⁷</p>
1854	<p>School described as first class⁸⁷⁸</p>
1857	<p>These schools are both mixed, and consist of an upper and lower school. I visit these schools under the power given by the statute; but I do so less frequently than I should do otherwise, owing to the extremely satisfactory manner in which they continue to be conducted. At the same time I regularly examine the children once a year with the same care that I bestow on other schools, and am enabled to report with certainty on thoroughly efficient instruction given in the upper school, and the perfectly practical character of the knowledge imparted. In scriptural knowledge, arithmetic, and even in elementary science, the higher classes are very proficient. The lower school aims at fewer subjects, but these are taught by Miss Garland (now Mrs. Roach) to my satisfaction; and I observe a</p>

⁸⁷⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1848 (1111), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷⁵ Parliamentary Papers 1850 (1256), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1851 (646), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷⁷ Parliamentary Papers 1852 (1532), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁷⁸ Parliamentary Papers 1854 (1841), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

	<p>manifest improvement from year to year. The children in this school are chiefly very small. In the upper school of 52, 28 were above 9 years old. The chief feature of the school continues to be its admirable industrial training in all kinds of spade husbandry, dairy work, washing, baking, etc. I am glad to be able to report that the new hospital, of which I have previously reported the necessity, is erected. The unions of Stourbridge and Newport have been permitted to send children to this school; the total number having fallen off sufficiently to admit them.⁸⁷⁹</p>
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⁸⁷⁹ Parliamentary Papers 1857 (2386), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Market Drayton

1848	<p>Organisation: unsatisfactory. Boys and girls taught together. The children cannot be kept entirely apart from the adults.</p> <p>Discipline: also unsatisfactory</p> <p>Method: none</p> <p>Instruction: there is an improvement in the instruction here, which is on the whole, tolerably good among the elder children. The master himself instructs them very fairly in writing and arithmetic.</p> <p>Master/mistress: the schoolmistress is daughter of the master and much too young as XXXXXX for such a school of boys and girls. A good master should be appointed here at once.</p> <p>Special: this workhouse is overcrowded with a very bad class of pauper.⁸⁸⁰ The boys have no industrial training</p>
1850	<p>Organisation: defective</p> <p>Discipline: fair</p> <p>Instruction: imperfect, but improving</p> <p>Master/mistress Schoolmistress</p> <p>Industrial training⁸⁸¹ boys occasionally in garden, girls moderate.</p>
1851	<p>Andrew Doyle. The Guardians are to build a new workhouse with ample space for industrial training.⁸⁸²</p>
1852	<p>Schoolmistress – Martha Crutchley – no qualification. The instruction here is much improved. The penmanship is excellent, religious knowledge and arithmetic very fair and reading and spelling satisfactorily taught.⁸⁸³</p>

⁸⁸⁰ Parliamentary Papers 1849 (1111), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸¹ Parliamentary Papers 1850 (1256), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸² Parliamentary Papers 1851 (646), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸³ Parliamentary Papers 1852 (1532), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Shifnal

1848	Anna Thompson, Permission First Class 12 ⁸⁸⁴
1850	Organisation: fair Discipline: moderate Instruction: defective Master/mistress: mistress only – Permission First Class Industrial training: boys none, girls fair ⁸⁸⁵
1851	Andrew Doyle. Schoolmistress intelligent ⁸⁸⁶
1852	Anna Thompson promoted to Probation Third Class. The children . . . in this school are not very satisfactorily instructed, but are neat and orderly ⁸⁸⁷
1854	School described as third class (out of four) ⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1849 (1111), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸⁵ Parliamentary Papers 1850 (1256), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1851 (646), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸⁷ Parliamentary Papers 1852 (1532), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

⁸⁸⁸ Parliamentary Papers 1854 (1841), *Minutes of Committee of Council on Education*.

Appendix 8

APPRENTICESHIP OF PAUPER CHILDREN

PARTIES

ART. 52.—No child under the age of nine years, and no child (other than a deaf and dumb child) who cannot read and write his own name, shall be bound apprentice by the Guardians.

ART. 53.—No child shall be so bound to a person who is not a housekeeper, or assessed to the poor-rate in his own name.

Or who is a journeyman, or a person not carrying on trade or business on his own account;

Or who is under the age of twenty-one;

Or who is a married woman.

THE PREMIUM

ART. 54.—No premium, other than clothing for the apprentice, shall be given upon the binding of any person above the age of sixteen years, unless such person be maimed, deformed, or suffering from some permanent bodily infirmity, such as may render him unfit for certain trades or sorts of work.

ART. 55.—Where any premium is given it shall in part consist of clothes supplied to the apprentice at the commencement of the binding, and in part of money, one moiety whereof shall be paid to the master at the binding, and the residue at the termination of the first year of the binding.

TERM

ART. 56.—No apprentice shall be bound by the Guardians for more than eight years.

CONSENT

ART. 57.—No person above fourteen years of age shall be so bound without his consent. And no child under the age of sixteen years shall be so bound without the consent of the father of such child, or if the father be dead, or be disqualified to give such consent, as hereinafter provided, or if such child be a bastard, without the consent of the mother, if living, of such child.

Provided, that where such parent is transported beyond the seas, or is in custody of the law, having been convicted of some felony, or for the space of six calendar months before the time of executing the indenture has deserted such child, or for such space of time has been in the service of Her Majesty, or of the East India Company, in any place out of the United Kingdom, such parent, if the father, shall be deemed to be disqualified as hereinbefore stated, and if it be the mother, no such consent shall be required.

PLACE OF SERVICE

ART. 58.—No child shall be bound to a master whose place of business, whereat the child is to work and live, is distant more than thirty miles from the place in which the child is residing at

the time of the proposed binding, or at the time of his being sent on trial to such master; Unless in any particular case the Commissioners shall, on application to them, otherwise permit.

PRELIMINARIES TO THE BINDING

ART. 59.—If the child whom it is proposed to bind apprentice, be in the Workhouse, and under, the age of fourteen years, the Guardians shall require a certificate in writing from the Medical Officer of the Workhouse as to the fitness in regard to bodily health and strength of such child to be bound apprentice to the proposed trade, and shall also ascertain from the Master of the Workhouse the capacity of the child for such binding in other respects.

ART. 60.—If the child be not in the Workhouse, but in the Union by the Guardians of which it is proposed that he shall be bound, the Relieving Officer of the district in which the child is residing shall examine into the circumstances of the case, the condition of the child, and of his parents, if any, and the residence of the proposed master, the nature of his trade, the number of other apprentices, if any, then bound to him, and generally as to the fitness of the particular binding, and shall report the result of his inquiry to the Guardians.

ART. 61.—If in any case within Article 60, the Guardians think proper to proceed with the binding they shall, when the child is under the age of fourteen years, direct the Relieving Officer to take the child to the Medical Officer of the district, to be examined as to his fitness in respect of bodily health and strength for the proposed trade or business; and such Medical Officer shall certify in writing according to his judgment in the matter, which certificate shall be produced by the said Relieving Officer to the next meeting of the Guardians.

ART. 62.—If the child be not residing within the Union, the Guardians who propose to bind him shall not proceed to do so unless they receive such a report as is required in Article 60 from the Relieving Officer of the district in which such child is residing, and certificate from some Medical man practising in the neighbourhood of the child's residence to the effect required in Article 61.

ART. 63.—When it is proposed to give a premium other than clothing upon the binding of any person above the age of sixteen years, the Guardians shall require a certificate in writing from some Medical practitioner, certifying that the person is maimed, deformed, or disabled, to the extent specified in such Article, and shall cause a copy of such certificate to be entered on their minutes before they proceed to execute the indenture.

ART. 64.—When such certificate, as is required by Articles 59, 61, 62 and 63, is received, or in case from the age of the child no such certificate is required, the Guardians shall direct that the child and the proposed master, or some person on his behalf, and in case the child be under the age of sixteen, that the parent or person in whose custody such child shall be then living, attend some meeting of the Board to be then appointed.

ART. 65.—At such meeting, if such parties appear, the Guardians shall examine into the circumstances of the case; and if, after making all due inquiries, and hearing the objections (if any be made) on the part of the relatives or friends of such child, they deem it proper that the binding be effected, they may forthwith cause the indenture to be prepared, and, if the master be present, to be executed but if he be not present they shall cause the same to be transmitted to him for execution; and when executed by him, and returned to the Guardians, the same shall be executed by the latter, and shall be signed by the child, as provided in Article 67.

ART. 66.—If the proposed master reside out of the Union, but in some other Union or Parish under a Board of Guardians, whether formed under the provisions of the first-recited Act, or of the Act of the twenty-second year of the reign of King George the Third, intituled 'An Act for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor,' or of any local Act, the Guardians shall, before proceeding to effect the binding, communicate in writing the proposal to the Guardians of such other Union or Parish, and request to be informed whether such binding is open to any objection, and if no objection be reported by such Guardians within the space of one calendar month, or if the objection does not appear to the Guardians proposing to bind the child to be sufficient to prevent the binding, the same may be proceeded with; and when

the indenture shall have been executed, the Clerk to the Guardians who executed the same shall send notice thereof in writing to the Guardians of the Union or Parish wherein the said apprentice is to reside.

INDENTURE

ART. 67.—The indenture shall be executed in duplicate, by the master and the Guardians, and shall not be valid unless signed by the proposed apprentice with his name, or if deaf and dumb with his mark, in the presence of the said Guardians; and the consent of the parent, where requisite, shall be testified by such parent signing with his name or mark, to be properly attested, at the foot of the said indenture; and where such consent is dispensed with under Article 57, the cause of such dispensation shall be stated at the foot of the indenture by the Clerk.

ART. 68.—The name of the place or places at which the apprentice is to work and live shall be inserted in the indenture.

ART. 69.—One part, of such indenture, when executed, shall be kept by the Guardians; the other shall be delivered to the master.

DUTIES OF THE MASTER OF A PAUPER APPRENTICE

ART. 70.—And We do hereby prescribe the duties of the master to whom such poor child maybe apprenticed, and the terms and conditions to be inserted In the said indenture to be as follows:

- No. 1. The master shall teach the child the trade, business, or employment set forth in the indenture, unless the Guardians authorise the substitution of another trade, business, or employment.
- No. 2. He shall maintain the said child with proper food and nourishment.
- No. 3. He shall provide a proper lodging for the said child.
- No. 4. He shall supply the said child with proper clothing during the term of the binding, together with the necessary provision of linen.
- No. 5. He shall, in case the said child be affected with any disease or sickness, or meet with any accident, procure at his own cost, adequate medical or surgical assistance, from some duly qualified medical man, for such child.
- No. 6. He shall, once at least on every Sunday, cause the child to attend some place of Divine worship, if there be any such within a reasonable distance, according to the religious persuasion in which the child has been brought up, so, however, that no child shall be required by the master to attend any place of worship to which his parents or surviving parent may object, nor when he shall be above the age of sixteen, any place to which he may himself object.
- No. 7. Where such parents or parent or next of kin desire it, he shall allow the said child to attend any Sunday or other school which shall be situated within the same parish, or within two miles distance from his residence, on every Sunday, and, if there be no such school which such child can attend, he shall, at some reasonable hour on every Sunday, allow any minister of the religious persuasion of the child to have access to such child for the purpose of imparting religious instruction.
- No. 8. Where the apprentice continues bound after the age of seventeen years the master shall, in every case where the Guardians require him so to do, pay to such apprentice, for and in respect of every week that he duly and properly serves the said master, as a remuneration, a sum to be inserted in the indenture, or to be agreed upon by the Guardians and the said master when that time arrives, or, if they cannot agree, to be settled by some person to be then chosen by the said master and such Guardians, and, until such sum be agreed upon or settled, not less than one fourth of the amount then commonly paid as wages to journeymen in the said trade, business, or employment.
- No. 9. The master shall, himself or by his agent, produce the apprentice to the Guardians by whom such apprentice was bound at their ordinary meeting next

preceding the end of the first year of the binding, and before the receipt of the remainder of the premium, if any be due, and, shall in like manner produce the said apprentice at some one of their ordinary meetings, to be held at or about the middle of the term, and whenever afterwards, required to do so by the, said Guardians: provided, that if the apprentice reside out of the Union by the Guardians whereof he was bound, the apprentice shall be produced, as hereinbefore directed, to the Guardians of the Union or Parish, as described in Article 66, in which the apprentice may be residing.

No. 10. The master shall not cause the said apprentice to work or live more than ten miles from the place or places mentioned in the indenture according to Article 68, without the leave of the Guardians so binding him, to be given under their common seal: provided, that such Guardians may in such licence so to be given under their common seal, by express words to that effect, if they think fit, authorise the master, any time during the residue of the term of the apprenticeship, to change the place of the abode or service of the, apprentice, without any further application to them or their successors.

ART. 71.—These duties of the master set forth in Article 70 shall be enforced by covenants and conditions to be inserted in the indenture to be execute by him.

ART. 72.—The master shall also covenant, under penalty to be specified in the covenant, not to assign or cancel the indenture, without the consent of the Guardians, under their common seal, previously obtained, and to pay to the said Guardians all costs and expences that they may incur in consequence of the said apprentice not being supplied with medical or surgical assistance by the master, in case the same shall be at any time requisite.

ART. 73.—The indenture shall be made subject to the following provisoes:

No. 1. That if the master take the benefit of any Act for the relief of insolvent debtors or be discharged under any such Act, such indenture shall forthwith become of no further force or effect.

No. 2. That if, on a conviction for a breach of any one of the aforesaid covenants and conditions before a Justice of the Peace, the Guardians who may be parties to the said indenture declare by a resolution that, the indenture is determined, and transmit a copy of such resolution, under the hand of their Clerk, by the post or otherwise, to the said master, such indenture shall, except in respect of all rights and liabilities then accrued, forthwith become of no further force or effect.

ART. 74.—Nothing contained in this Order shall apply to the apprenticing of poor children to the sea service.

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